THE THIRD WINDOW

NNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK

@ P. Sent to RR. L 9/20/20

REFERENCE LIBRARY OF

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

2 PARK STREET, BOSTON

NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THE SHELVES
EXCEPT BY PERMISSION OF
THE LIBRARIAN

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.
Archive
Collection

This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days

THE THIRD WINDOW

THE THIRD WINDOW

BY

ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK

(MRS. BASIL DE SÉLINCOURT)

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1920

COPYRIGHT, 1920, BY ANNE DOUGLAS DE SÉLINCOURT

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE THIRD WINDOW

THE THIRD WINDOW

I

"I LOVE this window," said Antonia, walking down the drawing-room; "and this one. They both look over the moors, you see. This view is even lovelier." She stopped at the end of the long room, and the young man with the pale face and the limping step followed and looked out of the third window with her. "But — I don't know why — I hate it. I wish it were n't here."

Captain Saltonhall looked out and said nothing.

"I wonder if you see what I mean," said Antonia.

"No; I don't. I like it." The young man spoke gently and with something of a drawl, unimpressed, apparently, by her antipathy and putting up the back of a placid forefinger to stroke along the edge of his moustache.

"One gets the hills, peaceful and silvery; one gets the walled garden and the cedar," she enumerated.

"The little pond with its fountain is as serene as a happy dream. It's all like a happy dream. Yet — I wish there were n't this window here."

"You could wall it up if you don't like it," Captain Saltonhall suggested, his eyes, as he stood behind her, turning from the walled garden beneath to fix themselves with a rather sad attentiveness upon the head of the young woman. Her dark hair was near him and the curve of her cheek; he thought that he felt against his the warmth of her shoulder in its thin black dress.

She looked out, motionless, for a little while; then, turning suddenly, as if with impatience of her thoughts, found him so near, and his eyes on hers. She, too, was pale and tall; but all in her was soft, splendid, and almost opulent, while he was sharp-edged and wasted. He looked much the older, though they were of the same age; both, indeed, were very young.

He did not move away as she faced him nor did his look alter. Sad and attentive, it merely remained attached upon her, and if he felt any nervousness it showed itself only in the slight gesture of his fore-

finger passing meditatively along the edge of his moustache. It was she who spoke. "Well, Bevis?" she said gravely. Her look asked: "Have you anything to tell me?"

"Well, Tony," he returned. He had, apparently, nothing to say.

She studied him for a moment longer, and then, with an added impatience — if anything so soft could so be called — walking away to an easy-chair before the fire, she said, "You think me very silly, I suppose."

"Silly? Why?"

"Because of the window. My hating it."

He came and leaned on the back of her chair, looking across her head up at the mantelpiece where a row of white fritillaries stood in tall crystal glasses, their reflections showing as if through a film of sea-water in the ancient mirror behind them. There had been white fritillaries among the flagged paths of the walled garden, and, finding them again, he recognized that they had been the only things he had felt uncanny there; for he had always felt them wraith-like flowers.

"I think you'd better wall it up, quite seriously, if you really hate it." He repeated his former suggestion. "It would rather spoil the room. But I would n't, if I were you, live with a discomfort like that — if it's really a discomfort."

The young woman beneath him laughed, a little sadly, if lightly. "How you suspect me."

"Of what, pray?"

"Oh — of unconscious humbug; of unconscious posing. Of induced emotions generally. It's always been the same."

"I rather like induced emotions in you," said Captain Saltonhall. "They suit you. They are like the colour of a pomegranate or the taste of a mulberry or the smell of a branch of flowering hawthorn; something rich, thick, and pleasingly oppressive."

"Thanks. I don't take it as a compliment."

"I don't mean it as one. I merely said I liked it in you; and if I do it's only because I'm in love with you."

He lowered his eyes now from the fritillaries to watch the very faint colour that rose, very slowly, in

her cheek. It could hardly be called a response. It was merely an awareness. And after a moment she said, still with her soft impatience: "Do come and sit where I can see you. It's bad for your leg to stand too long, I'm sure."

He obeyed her, limping to a chair on the opposite side of the fireplace, laying his hands on either arm as he lowered himself with some little awkwardness. He was not yet accustomed to the complicated mechanical apparatus, the artificial leg, that, always, he felt hang so heavily about his thigh.

Antonia Wellwood's dark eyes watched him, with solicitude, it seemed, rather than tenderness; though indeed their very shape — the outer corners drooping, a line of white showing under the full iris — expressed a melancholy so sweet that their most casual glance seemed to convey tenderness.

The young people sat then for a little while in silence. Though the spring day was sunny, it was sharp. On a bed of ashes the log-fire burned softly and clearly. The silvery light of the high, Northern sky shone along the polished floor.

The room was modern, like the house, and imaged carefully, but not too carefully for ease, eighteenth-century austerities and graces. The walls were panelled in white; the chintzes were striped in white and citron-colour. In spite of bowls of flowers, books and magazines, a half-knit sock here, its needles transfixing the ball of heather-coloured wool, and the embroidery there, with tangled skeins, it was an impersonal room, an object calmly and confidently awaiting appraisal rather than a long-memoried presence, making beauty forgotten in significance. It was not a room expressive of the young woman sunken in the deep chair. Appointed elaborately as she was, in her dense or transparent blacks, her crossed feet in their narrow buckled shoes stretched before her, her hands lying along the white and citron chintz, she was neither disciplined nor austere. Brooding, melancholy, restless, and with a latent exasperation, her eyes dwelt on the flames and her wide, small lips puckered themselves at moments as if with the bitterness of unshed tears.

She did not move for a long time, nor did the young

man who, his elbows propped, rested his chin on the backs of interlaced hands and surveyed her over them. He noted her, as he had done for many months now; just as, for months before that, he had, in France, dreamed over her; not her mystery; her clouded, drifting quality; he had perhaps got round that or perhaps given it up, sometimes he did not himself know which; but the pictorial incidents of her appearance; the black velvet bow in the gauze upon her breast; the heavy pins of tortoise-shell that held up her great tresses; the odd, dusky mark on her eyelids that looked like the freaking of a lovely else unblemished fruit; her pale cheek; her childlike forehead; her hand, beautiful and indolent, with its wedding-ring. He dwelt on all these appearances with a still absorption, and whether with more delight or irony he could not have told; but it was an irony at his own expense, not at hers; for he had always been a young man aloof from appearances, tolerant yet contemptuous of their appeal, and he knew that they absorbed him now because he was in love with her, and he sometimes even wondered if he was in love

with her because of them. He did not, however, wonder much. Before the war he would have computed, analyzed, perhaps done away with his passion with the fretting of over-acute thought. That sort of vitality, the analytic, destructive sort, had been, he imagined, bled, beaten, and cut out of him. He was now a wraith, a wreck of his former self, fit only for contemplation and acceptance. She was enough for him now, just as she was; ignorant, for all her accomplishment; indolent and self-absorbed; and she could more than satisfy him. The old acuteness remained, but it no longer tormented. He was aware of everything and all he asked was to possess it all. That, however, did n't mean that he pretended anything. If he had no illusions and asked for none, he did not let her think he had them.

"When did you begin to know you were in love with me?" she said at last, and now, in spite of the tearful pucker in her lips and liquid fulness of her eyes, he knew that the theme was the one to which she had intended to bring him. But it had n't been deviously; for all her shifting shadows and eddies she

was one of the straightest creatures he had ever known. Perhaps, after all, it was that quality in her, rather than the appearances, that accounted for his state.

"How long? Since I've loved you? Oh — since before Malcolm's death, I'm afraid."

It was what she had feared; he saw that, and that it hurt her. Yet it pleased her, too.

"I never guessed," she said.

He laughed. "Rather not! How could you have guessed?"

"Women do — these things."

"Perhaps you are less clever than other women, then, or I more clever than other men.'

"I don't think I'm less clever than other women," said Antonia, and a smile just touched her lips; another evidence of that straightness in her. She was willing to smile, even though smiling might be misunderstood. Yes, more than anything, perhaps, it was her genuineness he cherished.

"You're cleverer than most," he assured her. "Far. But I'm cleverer than most men."

"We are a wonderful pair!" she exclaimed, and he agreed: "We are indeed."

"And why was it?" she went on, more happily now, for, another precious point, and it seemed more than anything else to pair them, they were happy with each other. Apart from her woman's craving to feel her power over him, apart from his definitely amorous condition, they were comrades, and it crossed his mind, oddly, at the moment of thinking it, that this could not have been said of Antonia and Malcolm. Their relation had been that, specially, of man and woman, lover and beloved. He doubted, really, whether Antonia would have cared much about Malcolm had he not been a man and a lover. Whereas, had he himself been another woman, Antonia, he felt sure, would have made a friend of him. These reflections took him far from her question, and before the vague musing of his look she repeated it in an altered form. "Why did you begin — after having known me so long without?"

"Ah, that I can't tell. Perhaps it did n't begin. Perhaps it was always there. I knew it for the first

time when I was ordered to France; that day I came to say good-bye to you and Malcolm in London — before he went."

The name of her dead husband brought the cloud about her again. "Oh, yes," she murmured. "I remember that day. I was horribly frightened over the war. I had a presentiment. I knew he was going to volunteer."

"It could hardly have been a presentiment. He evidently would."

She showed no resentment for his clipping of her dark pinions. It was as if she still hovered on them as she said: "Of course. I mean presentiment of what came after that. What had to come. Don't you believe in Fate, Bevis? Perhaps it was that you felt in me. You had never seen me suffering before."

"Perhaps," said the young man, sceptically if kindly. "However, I don't want to talk about it," he added. "That is, unless you do, very much."

She looked up at him, still unresentful, but now a little ironic, though irony was not her note. "You are an odd lover, Bevis."

"Am I?"

"You don't like declaring your love."

"I have declared it."

"You don't like talking about it."

"Why should I? Unless you'll talk about yours, too. What you mean, I suppose, is that you miss pleading and passion in me and would like to see them displayed. I quite understand that in you. Perhaps it's what's needed to bring you round. But I'm not that sort of person. I could n't do it naturally. I think, though you miss it in me, you'd not really find it natural, either. We're too clever, too civilized, I suppose."

"I suppose we are," she conceded, though a little wistfully. "I don't exactly miss it. I know it's there. It's merely that I'd like you to talk about it, even if you don't display it."

"I'm glad you recognize that it's there," said the young man.

"Shall I tell you what I really feel about the window?" Antonia now asked. Her back was to it as she sat, and its great cedar, cutting against the pale blue

sky, made a distant background to her head. Like a Renaissance portrait, sombre, serene, splendid in tone, the picture she made was before him; an allegorical figure of poetry, youth or melancholy, with its dwelling eyes and spacings dark and pale. He was often to see her afterwards as she then looked across at him.

"We never lived at Wyndwards, you know, Malcolm and I," she said, "though Malcolm, of course, spent his life here until we married. But we visited his mother, often, and I never thought about the window then. It was only after Malcolm's death, and hers; when I stayed here alone for the first time; a year ago. Alone except for Cicely."

"Miss Latimer has always lived here, has n't she?" Captain Saltonhall inquired.

"Yes. But she is so much a part of it that it was like being alone. I used to walk up and down here and look out. Just a year ago it was; spring like this. And, as I walked, I found that while I loved looking out of the front windows, I shrank, I could n't tell why, from looking out of the third; the end one."

Antonia turned herself still farther in her chair, leaning both elbows on the wide arm. "I shrank from it, yet it drew me, too. And when I yielded, and looked, I felt frightened. And one day it came over me, as I looked out, that what I feared was that I should see Malcolm standing there, beside the fountain." Her voice had dropped. Her eyes dwelt on him, full of their genuine distress.

"Ah, I see." Captain Saltonhall nodded. "That was very natural, I think."

"Why natural?"

"He had died so shortly before. Your thoughts were full of him. The place is full of him — with all the years he lived here."

She listened to his alleviations, finding them, apparently, irrelevant. "But why the third window? Why only that one? Why not the others? He is more on the moors than in the flagged garden."

"A flagged garden with a fountain and a cedar tree is obviously a more suitable place for a ghost than the moors would be.'

"You do believe in ghosts and apparitions, then?"

"I don't know whether I believe in them or not. There may be appearances we can't account for. There's a good deal of evidence for them. But I don't believe they embody any consciousness. It's far more likely, from what I've read, that they are a kind of photograph of some past emotion."

"But, Bevis, would n't it frighten you dreadfully to see one, whatever it was?"

"Perhaps. Yes. It might be very nasty," he agreed.

"Yet if I could be sure that it embodied consciousness it might frighten me, but it would mean such rapture, too. I should know then that Malcolm had survived death and still thought of me."

"Yes. I see," Captain Saltonhall murmured, rather awkwardly. "Yes. Of course. That would be a great comfort to you."

"Comfort hardly expresses it, Bevis."

Silence fell between them for a little while, and when the young man next spoke it was still with the slight awkwardness. "But then, if that's what you need, you ought to like the third window and the chance you feel it gives you."

She heaved a weary, exasperated sigh, stretching out in her chair, stretching up her arms, letting them fall again along her sides, while, sunken, extended, she seemed to abandon to him the avowal of her own perplexity and extravagance. "I don't know what I want. I don't know what I fear. I don't know anything," she said.

A step came outside at this point and, the door opening, there entered a woman, older than the other two, though still not old, with a bleached face and bleached hair; a straight, old-fashioned little fringe showing under her hat. She paused at once on the threshold. "Am I interrupting?" she asked. Her voice was curiously high; not sharp or shrill; but high and reedy, like a child's.

"No. Not a bit. Of course not. Come in, Cicely," said Antonia sadly. She did not turn her eyes on the newcomer, but Captain Saltonhall did so, watching her as she crossed the room with her basket of spring flowers. She was dressed in weather-beaten mourning, with a knitted black silk scarf thrown back from her open jacket. The basket she carried was full of

primroses and windflowers, and, setting it down on a distant table, she began to fill the bowls and vases that she had evidently placed there in readiness. Her entry and her presence, which might be prolonged, were, he felt, very inopportune; yet Antonia showed no impatience of the interruption. Perhaps, indeed, Miss Latimer's presence was a relief to her, since she had really no answer to give to his rather arid and even provocative logic. It had been a little vicious of him to put it to her like that; but there was, he recognized, an instinct in him to show her that her perplexities were irrelevant and even absurd rather than to argue with them. She remained silent and sunken in her chair, slowly twisting her wedding-ring round and round her finger, and it must be apparent to Miss Latimer that she had interrupted an intimate conversation. He felt this to be a little unfortunate; why, he could not quite have said.

Miss Latimer, whom he had seen for the first time the night before, at dinner, after his late arrival, had not endeared herself to him. He had not liked her stillness, nor her whiteness, nor her sudden piping

voice. She was effaced, but not insignificant, and had an air, for all her silence, of taking everything in. Her small face, peaked and pinched rather than delicate, would have been childish, like her voice, were it not for her eyes. He reflected now, watching her move quietly among her flowers, that it was really because of her eyes he had not liked her. They were so unchildish; so large; so bright; so pale; and her broad eyebrows, darker in tint than her faded hair, gave them an almost startling emphasis. Her face seemed barred across by these eyebrows, and, beneath them, her eyes were like captives looking out.

The flowers at last were finished and placed, beautifully placed, beautifully arranged, the primroses in shallow white earthenware, the windflowers in glasses that showed their thin, rosy stems, and when Cicely Latimer went at last, closing the door softly behind her, he felt himself draw a long breath of relief.

"That's a singular little person," he remarked.

Antonia, it was evident, was not thinking of Cicely Latimer. Her eyes came back to him from far distances. Or, were they far, those distances? Was it in

shallows or in depths that her mind had lain dreaming?

"Is she a cousin, did you tell me?" he asked.

"Cicely?" She recovered his comment as well as his question and answered that first. "She's a great dear, not singular at all. Yes; a cousin; Malcolm's first cousin. A niece of old Mrs. Wellwood's."

"And she's always lived here?"

"Almost always. Mr. and Mrs. Wellwood built the house, you know, when they were first married, and Cicely came to them here as a child. She had been left an orphan."

"How old is she, then?"

"Oh, she must be quite old now," Antonia in her secure youth computed. "She was older, a good deal, than Malcolm; nearly forty, perhaps."

"She's still in mourning, I see."

"Yes. So am I," said Antonia, not resentfully, but with an added sadness. "It's not yet two years, Bevis. And hardly more than a year since Mrs. Wellwood's death."

"It's a matter of feeling, naturally. One does n't

expect a cousin to wear mourning as long as a widow. But they were like brother and sister, I suppose."

"Absolutely. Malcolm went to her with everything. He told her all about me when he first fell in love, and she helped him in it all."

"Will she go on living with you here?"

"Go on? Cicely? Of course she will. I can't think of this place without her. I think it would kill her if she were to be taken from it. Mrs. Wellwood spoke to me about it before she died. It 's like a sacred trust. She has a little money. It 's not that. But she 's as much a part of it as the trees and hills. She came to me at once, all the same, after everything happened, and said she would perfectly understand if I would rather start anew, quite by myself. There was n't a quaver or an appeal. She was, I saw, quite ready. She is the sort of person who is ready for anything. I told her that as long as she lived it was her home. I took her into my arms," said Antonia, "and, in a sense, she 's been there ever since. Though, in another sense, perhaps the deeper, it 's I who am in hers. She takes such wonderful, such devoted care of me."

"I see." Captain Saltonhall was feeling for his cigarette-case. "It's lucky you are so much attached to each other.—Do you mind?—Will you have one?"

"Please."

He was preparing to hoist himself out of his chair with the cigarette-case and match-box, but she sprang up and came to him. "You can't give yourself these luxuries of convention," she smiled, rather as if at an unruly patient. "You must let me wait on you, rather. At all events, till you get more used to it. Dear old Bevis. You're so brave that one forgets all about it."

She leaned over him, while he gave her a light, and then, the match having gone out in his rather unsteady fingers, leaned still nearer to light his cigarette from hers. But, gently, he laid his hands upon her arms and held her there, looking closely into her eyes. "Do you love me?" he asked.

Her cigarette was between her lips. She could not answer. He released one hand so that she might free herself, and although the gesture might have brought an element of mirth into their gravity she sought no

refuge in it. Half leaning, half kneeling beside him, she made no attempt to draw away and he saw her eyes widen in their grief, their perplexity, and their delight. "I don't know, Bevis dear. I don't know. How can I know?" she almost wept.

"You do know. I can tell you that you know, for I do. You love me." He had laid his hold again upon her and he slightly shook her as he spoke.

"I can't. I can't. You must let me wait. You must give me time."

"All the time you want. I've nothing to do but go on waiting. I'm ready for it. But don't be too cruel. What do you gain by it?"

"I don't mean to be cruel. Please believe that; please do."

"You don't mean it; but you are. It's enough for you to have me here, waiting, and making love to you, day after day, month after month, as I did in London. I understand it all. You keep him like that, and you keep me. And what torments you is that you can't see how you can keep us both if you give me more."

"Oh — Bevis. You are so horrible. So horribly clear. You are far, far clearer than I can ever be. Yet — no, that's not all there is to it. Give me time to think. I told you that I should think better up here, in his home — with you to help me. I can only think clearly if I'm given time."

"You can't do anything clearly. You're always in a mist. You want to know yourself; I grant you your honesty; but your feeling makes a mist around you. Listen to me. Let me show it to you. You love him still, of course. I should n't care for you if you did n't. You'll go on loving him. And it will hurt sometimes. It will hurt me, too. People are made up of these irreconcilable knots. It can't be helped. We're here in life together, and we belong to each other, and there's nothing between us but a memory. Perhaps you could go on holding out against me; but you can't go on holding out against yourself. You want to be mine nearly as much as I want you to be. Darling Tony — your eyes are full of love as you look at me now."

He had held her more tightly, drawn her more

near, and now, his haggard young face lighted with the sudden ardour of his conviction, he saw his light flash back to him from her, so that dropping his hands from her arms, he seized her, drew her down to him, enfolded her, and, feeling her yield, kissed her again and again.

"Bevis!" she whispered, amazed, aghast, yet, in her yielding, confessing everything.

When she drew herself away and stood up beside him, it was blindly, putting her hand out for the table, her face averted; and so she stood for a moment, while he saw that the colour bathed her face and neck. Then he saw that the tears rained down. He had, strangely, never seen her cry before, though he had seen her at the earlier moments of her great grief. She had been frozen, gaunt, lost, then.

"Darling Tony — forgive me."

"Oh," she wept, "it's not your fault!"

"Yes, it is. Don't ask me to regret it; but it is."

"No; no. It's not your fault," she repeated. And she began to move away, blindly.

"Tell me you forgive me." He had drawn himself up in his chair and looked after her.

"Of course I forgive you. I can't forgive myself."

"That's just as bad. Must you go?"

"I must. I must. Later — we'll talk. I'll try to think. I'll try to understand. I'll try to explain everything."

She had got herself to the door and she had not turned her face to him again. "Don't despise me," she said as she left him.

II

THOUGH the traces of her tears were still visible, Antonia met him at lunch with composure. Like all the rooms at Wyndwards, the dining-room was too accurate and intended and, darkly panelled as it was, the low mullioned windows looking out on the high ring-court, it had, through some miscalculation in the lighting, an uncomfortably sombre air. They sat there, the three of them, around the polished table, with its embroidered linens, its crystal and silver, highly civilized and modern in the highly civilized and modern room. He and Antonia, at all events, were that. Miss Latimer, perhaps, belonged to a more primitive tradition. It struck him that he would have liked Wyndwards better if it had kept to that tradition; the tradition, in fact, of making no attempts. As it was, it did n't match Miss Latimer, nor, though modern and civilized, did it match him and Tony. It was neither sceptical nor sophisticated, nor indifferent.

Antonia leaned her elbow on the table while she ate and looked out at the ring-court. Miss Latimer stooped, but did not lounge. She still wore her hat and ate in a business-like manner, throwing from time to time a bit of bread or biscuit to the dogs. The task of talking to her fell entirely upon him, for Antonia, though composed, was evidently in no mood for talking. He asked her questions about the country and its birds, beasts, and flowers, and she answered, if not affably, yet with an accuracy that betrayed a community of taste.

She told him that they were rather too far north to get stone-curlews, as he had hoped they might. "I found a nest once," she said: "but that was when I was staying with some people ten miles away."

"What luck! Did you see the birds?"

"Yes. I hid near by for some hours and saw them going to and fro. I could have photographed them if I had had a camera."

"What luck!" Captain Saltonhall repeated, with sincerity. "I've only once had a glimpse of one,

flying. Queer, watchful, uncanny creatures, are n't they, with great, clear eyes."

"They are rather strange-looking birds."

It struck him suddenly that Miss Latimer herself looked like a stone-curlew.

"They've the same cry, nearly, as the ordinary curlew, have n't they?" he continued. "You get plenty of those up here, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. You can hear them any day. It is rather the same sort of cry."

Antonia knew little about the country and was not observant of nature; but now, leaning her head on her hand and looking out of the window, she remarked, unexpectedly: "I hate their cry; if it is the cry of curlews I mean. Are n't they the birds that have that high, bleak, drifting wail?"

"Oh, I rather like it," said Captain Saltonhall. "Yes, that's the bird. It's the sort of melancholy ordained by Providence to go with tea-time and a wood-fire, as eggs are ordained to go with bacon."

"No," said Antonia. "It's ordained to go with nothing. It makes me think of something that has

been forgotten; something that has given up even the hope of being remembered, yet that laments."

"But the curlew is n't forgotten. It is probably calling to its mate."

"Probably. I am not talking of the natural history of the bird. Its cry sounds like the cry of a creature that has been forgotten by its mate."

"What do you think it sounds like?" he asked Miss Latimer. He distrusted the direction taken by Antonia's thoughts.

And, looking before her, seeming not to follow their definitions, she answered coldly:

"I think Antonia describes it very beautifully."

After lunch Antonia said that Miss Latimer must show them the garden. He saw that she intended to keep this companion near them and would not, for the present, be alone with him.

In the flagged hall, wide and light, there were oaken chests and tables and large framed engravings of cathedrals. Antonia selected a sunshade from the stand. None were black; they were all pre-war sunshades, and the one she found made her lovely head,

when they went out into the sunlight, seem still paler and darker against its faded poppy-red.

She led them first into the little walled garden of her fears. One stepped out into it from a door in the hall, and, wondering if she had put a wholesome compulsion upon herself, he expressed an indirect approval of her good sense by pausing to look about him and to say, "How delightfully planned this is."

He had never seen so many white fritillaries growing together; their jade green and alabaster white, rising from narrow beds among the flags, seemed like another expression of the stone. The fountain was musical, and the stone bench under the great cedar invited to poetical reverie. "That cedar is the oldest thing here, is n't it?" he asked.

Antonia stood, gently turning the handle of the sunshade on her shoulder, and she, too, looked about her, her eyes meeting his for a moment as if, with a grateful humour, acknowledging his approbation. "I'm not quite as foolish as you may think," they told him.

"It's the only old thing in the place," she said —

"except for the bits of ruin in the garden walls. There was a border castle here, long ago, and the cedar must have belonged to its later days. I'm glad it's all so new, are n't you? I don't like old places. Not to live in."

It was, perhaps, only as looked down at from the third window that the flagged garden had its uncanniness for her. She seemed quite content to stand there in the sunlight and admire it with him. Any distaste or reluctance was Miss Latimer's, and he did not know why it was that he divined it beneath her air of detachment. It was she who, presently, moved away, passing out into the high-walled kitchen garden, and they followed her.

There were cordon fruit-trees round the vegetable-beds, and daffodils, at one end, grew thickly against the walls. Wide, herbaceous borders ran on either side of the central path, showing already their clumps and bosses of green and bronze.

"Cicely plans it all, you know," said Antonia, going now before them, "and does heaps of the work herself, with spade and fork. Mrs. Wellwood had only

the one gardener and a boy. I can't think how Cicely contrives to keep it all so beautifully."

"It was Mrs. Wellwood who planned it all," said Miss Latimer. But she could not disown the work.

He was seeing her more and more clearly as one of those curious beings whose personalities are parasitic on a place. He doubted whether her thoughts ever wandered beyond Wyndwards. All her activities, certainly, were conditioned by it. It would not be only that she dug and planted, hoed and watered, mulched and staked and raked in the garden. He felt sure, too, acute young man that he was, that she cut out the loose chintz covers for the furniture, superintended the making of marmalade in spring and jam in summer, kept a careful eye on the store-cupboard and washed the dogs with her own hands. There were two dogs: an old Dandie Dinmont and a young fox-terrier; and he had, all the while they walked, a feeling, not a bit ghostly, amusing rather than sad, that they were bits of Malcolm's soul, detached bits, remaining on earth behind him; the Dandie Dinmont the soul of his happy boyhood at Wyndwards and

the fox-terrier the soul of his maturity. Miss Latimer would find in tending them the same passionate satisfaction she had in all of it; the place, and the persons it still embodied for her and who for her survived in it, indistinguishably mingled. All of it was her life and she could imagine no other.

Antonia would never be that sort of woman. Places, if not parasitic upon her, at least were mere settings and backgrounds. She made the silvery forms of the distant hills subservient to her beauty as, with the faded silken sunshade, she drifted before them along the paths. She wore still, rather absurdly, though the day was so fine and the paths so dry, her little black satin house-shoes, high-heeled and laced about the ankle with satin ribbon; and as she walked she cast her admiring, unobservant glances to right and left or stooped now and then to pat the dogs. The dogs were very fond of her, racing forward and then returning to look up at her with interrogative delight. That, too, made him think of Malcolm. They were much fonder of Tony than of Miss Latimer, to whom they owed so much.

It was he who had to do all the talking to Miss Latimer, and it was difficult to talk to her and to express his accurate appreciation of her gardening exploits, or his admiration of the changing views of the house that their walk disclosed, since, in answering him, it was always as if she avoided some attempt at intimacy and as if he could make no reference to the place without being too personal. This was especially funny since, behind his praise, was the judgment that what the place lacked was personality; and he had n't the faintest wish to be intimate with Miss Latimer.

It was not until after tea that he again found himself alone with Antonia. They were in the drawing-room, the tea-table had been taken away, the lamps lighted, and Antonia was embroidering before the fire.

"Would she hate me if I ever did come to marry you?" he asked. He asked it without seeming to recall the morning and its avowal.

Antonia, following his advice, was selecting a shade of azalea-green to lay against her pearly grey.

She had always asked his advice about such matters, and the cushions and firescreens in her London house recalled to him how many summer afternoons before the war when, on week-ends in the country, she had held up her work to ask, "*Is* that right, Bevis?" while Malcolm smoked beside them, amused by their preoccupation over the alternative of pink or orange.

"Cicely, you mean?" Antonia asked.

"Yes. Would she resent it? Would she hate me for it? — and you?"

Antonia considered, and he knew while she considered, her eyes on the azalea silk, that he filled her again with deep delight. He and his passion were there, encompassing, yet not pursuing her. She gave nothing and betrayed nothing and she was secure of all.

"I don't think she could hate me. That sounds fatuous; but I believe it's true. I don't know about you. But no; I don't think she'd resent it. Why should she?"

"Well, caring for him so much and seeing me here in his place."

"How brave you are, Bevis," said Antonia after a moment, drawing out her silk. It was the quality in him to which she most often reverted.

"Am I? Why?"

"You are not afraid to remind me."

"Why should I be afraid? I know your thoughts. But I'm not going to talk about them, or about mine. I want you to explain Miss Latimer."

"There's not much to explain. She shows it all, I think. She's deep and narrow and simple. You don't like her. I can see that."

"I can't imagine how. I'm constantly making myself agreeable."

"To me; not to her. She knows as well as I do why you take trouble over her. Not that I blame you. I did n't think I should like her when I first saw her. And then I came to find that I did; more and more; very, very much. Or, perhaps, it is trust, rather than liking," Antonia mused. "Poor little Cicely. Do you know, I don't think any one has ever really liked her much. Not old Mrs. Wellwood, really, nor even Malcolm. It hurt me to feel, in a moment, that Mrs.

Wellwood liked even me, whom she hardly knew, better."

"I am not surprised," Captain Saltonhall commented.

"No; but that's not relevant, Bevis; because one does n't expect one's mother-in-law to like one, however charming one may be. What I felt about it was that Cicely had starved her, just as she starved Cicely. Neither could give the other anything except absolute trust. Cicely was the fonder, I think, for old Mrs. Wellwood was cold as well as shy, cold to every one but Malcolm; even with me she was cold; and even with Malcolm she was, always, shy."

"Dismal it sounds, for all of them."

"No; it was n't that. Cheerful and serene rather. But all the same Cicely is pathetic. And the more I think of her, the more I admire her. She's so individual, yet so impersonal, if one can make the distinction. There's no appeal of any sort; no demand. She never seems to need anything or to ask anything; perhaps that is why she does n't gain devotion; the more self-absorbed and demanding people are, the more

devotion they get, I'm afraid. At all events, she's absolutely devoted; absolutely selfless and straight."

"What did they do with themselves, she and Mrs. Wellwood, when Malcolm was n't here to give them an object? I never saw his mother. He said she hated coming to town."

"Oh, it was miserable to see them in town, as I did once; forlorn, caged birds. Malcolm was their object, you see, even when he was n't here. And they lived together just as Cicely lives now alone. There are country neighbours — Mrs. Wellwood was scrupulously sociable — and the village, and the garden. Cicely still goes to read to old bed-ridden women and to take them soup. I thought, in my London ignorance, that the lady-bountiful was a figure of fun to every one nowadays, flouted from the cottage door, and all the rest of it. But I've found out that there's nothing the cottage really loves so well. Independence and committees bore them dreadfully; they have all that here; there's an energetic vicar's wife, and she got even poor Mrs. Wellwood on her committee; it bores the village people, but it frightened her. Cicely

never would. I can't imagine Cicely on a committee. She'd have nothing to say, though it would n't frighten her."

He had always savoured Antonia's vagrant impressionism. "Did they read?" he asked.

"I should rather think so!" she laughed a little. "They were great on reading. All the biographies in two volumes and all the travels, and French *mémoires* — translated and expurgated. Cicely has the most ingenuous ideas about the court of Louis the Fourteenth. Novels, too; but they contrived always to miss the good ones. I don't suppose they ever attempted a Henry James or heard of Anatole France."

"And never danced a tango, *à plus forte raison*, or saw a Russian ballet."

"They did see a Russian ballet, that once they were up. Malcolm and I took them. I think it bewildered Mrs. Wellwood, and Cicely was very dry about it. And they saw me dance the tango; I did it for them, here," said Antonia, and involuntarily she sighed, although she did not look up at her companion. She and Bevis, adepts of the dance, had, before the war,

danced together continually. "They liked seeing me do it," she said. "They liked my differences and what they felt to be my audacities. But they'd have liked anything Malcolm did." And then she came back to his first question. "As far as that goes, my remarrying, if I ever did, as long as it was n't too quickly, and some one Malcolm liked, I don't for a moment think she'd mind."

Captain Saltonhall did not agree with her, but he did not say so. They talked, thus, very pleasantly, till the hour for dressing, and after dinner Antonia sang to him and Miss Latimer. "What shall it be, Cicely?" she asked, and Miss Latimer said, "The old favourites, please." So that Captain Saltonhall, who had only heard her sing Brahms, Duparc, and Debussy, heard now old English folk-songs and "Better lo'ed you could na' be." She had a melancholy, sweet, imperfect voice, and though her singing had magic it was the flutelike, expressionless magic of the woodland. She sang indolently, like a blackbird, and the current of the song carried her. But it was a voice that moved him more than any other voice he knew, and

as he sat, impassive, apparently, his hands clasped round his knee, he felt the tears, again and again, rising to his eyes.

Miss Latimer sat staring into the fire. She was dry-eyed. But he felt sure that she, too, was only apparently impassive. He felt sure that these songs had been Malcolm's favourites, too.

III

THEY were sitting next day in a sunny hollow of the moors. Above their heads the spring air was chill, and as they had walked they had felt the wind; but, sunken in this little, sheltered cup, summer was almost with them and the grass and heather exhaled a summer fragrance. Bevis had insisted on the walk, saying that he could manage it perfectly, and indeed they were half a mile from the house before he had owned that they had gone far enough for his strength; a little too far, he was aware, as they sank down on the grass, and he was sorry, for he knew from Antonia's face that she was going to talk to him and that all his strength and resource would not be too much for the interview.

"I've been thinking, Bevis," she began at once, sitting a little below him, her hands clasped round her knees. "I want to tell you everything. In the first place, let me be quite straight. I do love you," she said, without looking round at him. "I am in love with you."

"Yes," he assented.

"What happened yesterday morning could n't have happened had I not been," she defined for herself. "Not that I mean it exonerates me."

"Or me?"

"You don't need exoneration. You are not unfaithful."

"No, I'm not unfaithful; and I don't think you are. But go on."

She paused for a moment as though his assurance hurt rather than helped her. "That is what it all comes back to, for me, Bevis. Am I unfaithful? If Malcolm were alive, I should be."

"If Malcolm were alive, you would n't be in love with me," he set her straight.

"I'm so glad you see that and believe it," she murmured, while he saw the slow flush in her cheek. "That's one of the things I most wanted to make clear."

"You had no need to, my dear girl. I know how it was with you and Malcolm."

"You know. You remember. Yes." She drew a

deep breath. He had comforted her. "So, you see, I'm only in love with you because he is n't here any longer. If he were here, I could n't love any one but him." She stopped for a moment. "Bevis, that is what it comes to. Is he here?"

"Here? How do you mean?" the young man asked.

"Are we immortal? Do we survive death? Does Malcolm, somewhere, still love me?" She kept her face turned from him and he was aware that he felt her questions irrelevant and that this was wrong of him or perhaps came of his being tired. Or perhaps it came from the fact that the soft edges and tips of Antonia's averted profile, soft yet so clear, shadowed yet so pale, against the sky, were more relevant than any such questions. He looked away from her, calling himself to order, and then, in a different voice, for though he still felt her questions irrelevant, he was able to think of them, he said, "I see."

What he seemed first to see was himself as he had been not many years ago, a youth in his rooms at Oxford. Books piled beside him, a pipe between his

teeth, he saw himself staring into the fire, while, in a sad yet pleasant perplexity, he had brooded on such questions. Body and soul; appearance and reality; the temporal and the eternal consciousness; — the old words chimed in his brain. Then came a swift memory of Antonia and himself dancing the tango in London, and then the memory of the dead face of a little French *poilu* he had come upon one evening in France, by the roadside, a face sweet and childlike. How many dead faces he had seen since he had danced the tango with Antonia, and how wraithlike, beside the agonies he had since passed through, were the mental disciplines and distractions of his studious youth! Yet it all held together. It was because of the agonies that the answers had come.

Antonia's voice broke in upon his reverie and his eyes were brought back to her. "Help me, Bevis," she said.

Something in that made him dimly smile. "Help you in what way, my dear girl? Which do you want most — to have me and to believe that Malcolm does n't exist any longer; or to believe him immortal

and to lose me?" He had not meant to be cruel; he was placing the dilemma before himself as well as her; but he saw he had been, when her slow, helpless gaze of pain turned upon him and her eyes filled with tears.

"Why do you always show me that I must despise myself?" she said. "How can I know what I want?"

"Dear Tony," he said gently, "what you want, what you really want, is me. And I don't despise you for that."

"Oh — it's not so simple, Bevis; — oh, it's not! I want you; but if he were here I'd go to him and leave you without a pang."

"No, you would n't," he smiled grimly. "You'd leave me, of course, because he has been far more in your life than I have; — and he is your husband. But it would n't be without a pang."

"With a pang, then," she was brave and faced it. "But that would pass when I had told him everything and been forgiven. Malcolm, I know, would forgive me."

"I should rather say he would!" Still the young

man laughed a little grimly. "Why should n't he? If a man returns from the dead, he must expect to find that the world has gone on without him, must n't he? After all, Tony dear, Malcolm has n't merely gone to Australia or Patagonia; he's dead; and that does make a difference."

She was the most generous and unresentful of creatures. A warm flood of recognition filled him as he saw how he still hurt her and how she took it. And he was harsh and crabbed. He had always had an ironic tongue and an ironic eye for reality, in himself and in others. And now, entangled in his own passion and in the webs of her dreams and difficulties, he recognized something perfidious in his nature, something that, while it adored her, yet found pleasure, or relief, in dealing her now and then, as a punishment for what she made him suffer, the light lash of his unentangled and passionless perception. And who was he to lash Tony?

"Forgive me," he said, leaning over and looking down at her. "I am a brute, as I told you. Why am I not more merely grateful to you for loving any one so

useless? I'll help you in any way I can, Tony. What do you really want to ask me? Perhaps what makes me so odious to you is that I've got no help for you."

Perhaps it was. A shrinking from the issue she put before him had been in him from the first.

And poor Tony did not suspect what he meant; did not, for all her attempt at clearness, see in what way she really wanted him to help her.

"Please, please do," she said. "Try to be gentle and to understand. I'll go by what you say. So there it is: Do *you* believe in immortality, Bevis?"

There it was, indeed, and no wonder he had shrunk. If it had come to him as a test before the war, how easy it would have been, with a sincerity sad, for all its personal gain, to say, "I don't know; I really don't know what I believe, darling; but it does n't seem to me at all likely." But now, leaning over her, still looking at her, he had to answer in the only verbal form that fitted with his thought, and as he did so he felt himself grow pale. "Yes," he said; "I do believe in immortality, Tony."

She, too, then grew very pale. It was as he had

foreseen. She had not really believed. It had only been a haunting dream. And her hope had been that he would tell her that to him, too, it was only a dream. Poor child! Poor, poor child. And poor Malcolm. Was it with this face he was welcomed back among the realities of her world? She continued to look at him in silence, taking it all in, with a trust, an acceptance, pitiful indeed; and suddenly, seeing in her despair his full justification, he took her into his arms; — was it to comfort, or to claim her, against his conviction and her despair? "My darling," he said, pressing his head against hers, "it can't part us. It shan't part us. I won't let you destroy your life and mine."

She had, piteously, put her arms around his neck and she clung to him like a frightened child.

"Listen, dearest," he said; "when I say it I don't mean it in the way you feel and fear it. I don't know how to say what I believe. It does n't go into words. But it all means love. That 's what I've come to know. I can't explain how. It came to me, one night, in a sort of inner vision, Tony, after dreadful things

had happened — over there, you know. But he is safe and we are safe. We are all held round by love. That's what I believe, Tony. It's God that makes the meaning of immortality, not immortality that makes the meaning of life."

Nothing, he knew it as he held her, could ever bring them nearer than this moment. He had never in his life been so near any creature. Reticent, and, with his English nature, passionately shy, never in his life could he have believed himself capable of uttering such words. It was doing himself a violence to utter them, yet sweet to do himself the violence for her. And, as if he had cut out his heart to show to her, it seemed to him that it must bring her his conviction: must light faith in her from the flame it bared.

But, in the silence that followed and as she still clung to him, his child and not his lover, it came to him that he had lighted nothing. She groped in a bewilderment of darkness.

"But he's there," she said. "He knows and feels and suffers, if he's there."

"No, no, Tony. It's not like that. We are all together, your love and his and mine, in the eternity where Malcolm is."

"All together? When you tell me that it's you I want — not him? I don't know what you mean, Bevis. How can he not suffer when I forget him in loving you?"

"You don't forget him in loving me. But we're not made in such a way that we can think of everything at once. I don't believe he suffers. Our love may be happiness to him." But now he was using mere words. He had fallen back into the world of words. This was not the light he had tried to show her.

"But if love is around us there, it's around us here, too; yet people, here, suffer terribly. They may go on suffering terribly when they are gone. You can't know what they feel when they are gone, Bevis."

"No; I can't know. We can know nothing, of course. It's a question of feeling, rather. I don't feel it as you do, and the reason for that is, I think, that I

see more of the truth than you do; that I have more faith."

He knew his faith; but he no longer felt it. That was because his body was becoming very tired. And her fear, too, had its infecting power. A pang did stir his heart.

Poor Tony. She never knew when to stop; never knew when there was nothing more to be gained. Mercilessly and pitifully she went on: "If it's still Malcolm, must he not be waiting for me; wanting me? Has n't love like that something special and unsharable? Oh, you know it has. It must be two; it can't be three. How could I go to him, with you? Which of you would be my other self? You know you could not share me. We could not hold each other, like this, and love each other, if Malcolm stood before us now."

"I know," he said, and his deep fatigue was in his voice. "Perhaps one must accept that there is loss and suffering always. Perhaps Malcolm does grieve to see you with me. Who can tell? I can't. I can only say that I don't feel it so. I can only say that if I felt

it so I'd not want to marry you; I could n't want you if I felt it so. And even if you yourself felt him so near and real that my love could only hurt you, I'd go away and leave you in peace. But it's not like that, Tony. It would n't be to leave you in peace. You could n't bear to have me go. Something quite different has happened. You've fallen in love with me."

She sat silent in his arms, her head still leaning on his shoulder, and he knew from her slow, careful breathing that she was intensely thinking and that he had not helped her. If only he had not been so tired to begin with, perhaps he might have found something more. But he was now horribly tired and his artificial leg began to pull at him, and though he sat very still, she must at last have guessed at his growing exhaustion, for, raising herself, she drew away, saying, in a dulled and gentle voice: "Shall we walk back? Your leg must be getting stiff."

He took her hand as she stood beside him and kissed it without speaking, and he saw that she turned her head away then to hide her tears.

They walked slowly up toward the house by the

winding path among the heather. Wyndwards stood high and they had to climb a little. Only when they drew near did she speak, and in a trembling voice.

"You've shown me all the truth. I've been unfaithful. I am unfaithful. If I'd loved him enough, if I'd loved him as he should have been loved, I could n't have fallen in love with you."

"Perhaps," said the young man.

"What I say to myself is this," Antonia went on. "If he had been alive and had gone away, as you said, to Australia or Patagonia, and during his absence I had grown fond of you and fallen in love — what I say to myself is that of course I should have fought against the feeling and avoided seeing you, and when he came back I should have confessed to him what had happened. And he would have forgiven me. It would make him very unhappy; but I know that Malcolm would forgive me."

"Right you are, my dear Tony; he would. And you'd have fallen out of love with me and gone on living happily ever after."

She ignored his jaded lightness. "Well — is n't it

like that now? Can't I do that now?" She stopped in the little path and her soft, exhausted face dwelt on him.

"No," said Bevis patiently, but his own exhaustion was in his voice; "it is n't like that now. As I've said, the difference is that he won't come back; that he is dead."

"But immortal, Bevis."

"I believe, immortal."

"Could n't I in the same way, when I find him again, confess and be forgiven?"

"You'd not need to, my child." A certain dryness was in his voice. "He knows all about it, I imagine; and more than you do."

"You mean that he knows and has forgiven already?"

"He has n't much to forgive!" Bevis could not repress, with a drier smile.

"You are unkind."

"I know. Forgive me, Tony dear; but you are tormenting. Don't let us talk about it any more. There's nothing to be gained by it."

"I don't mean to be tormenting. Is n't it for your sake, too?"

"I can bear more," he laughed now, "if you can assure me of that!"

"There may be a way out, Bevis; there may be a way out, although you can't show it to me, although I can't find it yet. Because you don't feel as I do; and you may be right and I wrong. You do believe that everything is changed, quite changed, after we die? You do believe that it does not hurt him?"

He was aware, with a dim, a tender irony, of the so feminine impulse in her that, when she no longer found any help in him, sought help for herself in her own misconceptions of his beliefs. Irony deepened a little, and tenderness, as he set her straight.

"I don't believe it hurts him; but I don't believe, either, that everything is changed. It depends on what you call change."

"You believe it's all peace and love; that people there don't feel in the way we do here?" She was supplicating him.

"You might put it like that, perhaps," he acqui-

esced, "though even here we feel peace and love sometimes." And, glancing up at the house, as she had laid her hand on his arm, he added: "Miss Latimer is looking out at us. Don't take your hand off quickly, all the same."

She had not controlled herself, however, from glancing round at the house, in an upper window of which they saw a curtain fall.

"It makes no difference," she said. "She must know why you are here. She must know that I am very fond of you."

"You mean she must know how faithless? There's no point in her thinking you faithless — unless you're going to be, is there?"

"Why do you gibe at me," she murmured, "and taunt me, when I need help most of all? Why are you so dry and cold?"

"My dear," he said, "I'm frightfully tired. You're twice as strong as I am, and I think my case is safer in your hands than in my own. That's what it comes to. I'm not dry and cold. Only worn out. What I'd like" — and putting his hand within her arm, indifferent

to the possible spectator, he glanced round at her with a smile half melancholy and half whimsical — "would be to be with you in the firelight somewhere, and stillness; and to put my head on your breast and go to sleep, for hours and hours; held in your arms. Is that cold, Tony?"

IV

WAS one not, when one could make speeches like that, to be listened to as Tony had listened to him — was one not, implicitly, an accepted lover? They had hurt and misunderstood each other and their talk had left a strain; yet such hurts, in natures as intimately united as his and Tony's, only brought one the nearer. After all, in spite of his essential failure with her, he had shown her, in a clear light, the shapes of her half-seen fears. That was all to the good. She must now, for the first time, accept such fears fully; and might she not, as a result, find herself the readier to live with them? And though she had not seen his truth, he had, through his very unkindness, what she had felt to be his gibes and taunts, made her see her own; and Tony's truth was, simply, that she could never give him up. So he had computed and analyzed during the evening, while Tony had again sung to them and while Miss Latimer sat, her head bent beneath a lamp, and put fine darns into an

embroidered tea-cloth. And what most came to him next morning, with the sense of shock, was an awareness of hidden things; of hours in which he had no part, when Tony said to him, "I talked to Cicely last night."

They were, as usual, in the drawing-room, after breakfast, and Antonia had seated herself on the low cane settee before the fire, for the grey day was chilly and she had, to an unbecoming extent, the look of being cold. When Tony looked least beautiful, she looked most childlike, and it was for her childlike self that he felt, always, his deepest tenderness aroused. And he was aware now, as he meditated her announcement, of the curious check it gave to his tenderness. "Did you?" he said. His tone was dry. He was not glad to hear that Miss Latimer was in their counsels; but it was a more subtle disquiet than that that took his thoughts from Tony's dear pouting lips and tightened eyelids. Miss Latimer had all sorts of chances that he did n't have. His love was like a steady vase into which Tony's fluidity inevitably poured and shaped itself when he was with her. But

when he was not there, Miss Latimer had spells that dissolved her again into wistful, wandering water.

"I did n't tell her, of course, that I was in love with you and was wondering whether I might marry you," Antonia went on, "though I think she must know it. I said nothing about myself, really. What we talked of was immortality. I asked her what she believed."

He kept his eyes upon her, though she did not meet them, standing before her, his cigarette between his teeth. And she felt his displeasure in his silence.

"She does n't think as you do," Antonia went on, in a carefully steady voice. "I mean, her belief is much more definite than yours; much deeper; for she 's always believed, and you, I think, from what you told me, have n't; — and, oh, passionate. I can't express to you how I felt that. A white flame of certitude."

"Ah," Bevis murmured. He knocked the ash from his cigarette and examined the tip. "No; I've no white flames about me."

She did not pause for his irony. "And we spoke of Malcolm. We never have spoken of him before. I asked her if she expected to see him again, as she

knew him here; unchanged. And she does. No; expect is not the right word. She is sure of it. And she told me something else. Malcolm believed like that. He and she had talked about it; twice. Once when he was hardly more than a boy. And once before he went to France, on the last night he spent here, with her and his mother. He was sure, too. He believed that he was to see me, and her, again. Cicely cried and cried in telling me. I never saw her cry before."

"Did Malcolm ever talk to you about it?" Bevis asked her after a moment. If he had computed and analyzed new hopes last night, how much more, this morning, he found himself analyzing and computing new difficulties. He had more than Tony's fluidity to deal with now. Like a tragic, potent moon, Miss Latimer drew her tides away from the rest and safety of the shores he stretched for them.

"No," she answered, still in the careful, steady voice. "Never like that. Though I remember, in looking back, things he said that meant it."

He recognized then, and only then, when she answered with such unsuspecting candour, the treacher-

ous suggestion that had underlain his query. Could he really have wanted to hint that Malcolm's deepest confidence had been given to his cousin and not to her? Could he really have hoped that a touch of spiritual jealousy might help him? How complete her trust in her husband, and how justified, was further revealed to him, for his discomfiture, as she went on: "It was of me they talked that last night; of our love for each other. He wanted to thank her, again, for having helped him to win me."

They were silent for a little after that; he cast down upon the sofa beside the fire and Antonia on her settee, her hands holding it on either side, her eyes fixed before her, a new hardness in their gaze. She was, this morning, neither the frightened child nor the helpless lover. She had withdrawn from him, and whether in coldness or control he could not tell. But it was not with her own strength she was armed. She had withdrawn in order to think, without his help, and with the help of Miss Latimer.

"Well, what does it all come to for you, now?" he asked, and he heard the coldness in his voice, a cold-

ness not for her, but for that new opponent he had now to deal with.

"It makes it all more terrible, does n't it?" she said, sitting there and not looking at him.

"You mean her belief has so much more weight with you than mine?"

"Does it contradict yours?"

"You know it does; or why should things be more difficult — terrible you call them — for you this morning? You say she is more definite than I am. I think definiteness in such matters pure illusion, and I only ask you to realize that it's easy to a simple nature like Miss Latimer's. She is unaware of the complexity of the problem."

"You think that Malcolm, too, was so simple?"

"I do. Not so simple as Miss Latimer; but simpler than you, and you know it; and far simpler than I am; and you know that, too, my dear."

She sought no dispute. Almost with a hard patience she went on. "Was n't their definiteness intuition rather than illusion? Is n't intuition easier for the simple than for the complex?"

"Intuition is n't definiteness; that's just what it is n't. As for it's being easier; everything is easier, of course, to simple people." She, like himself, and she had admitted it, was complex; yet his terrible disadvantage with her was that, while too clever to be satisfied by anything she did not understand, she was too ignorant, really, to understand the cogency of what he might have found to say. Miss Latimer's simplicities would have more weight with her.

"Something must be definite," she said. "Immortality means nothing unless it can in some way be defined. It must mean a person, and a person means memory, feeling, will. So, if Malcolm is immortal, he exists now, as he existed here; unchanged; loving me, as he told Cicely he should always love me; and waiting for me, as he told her he would wait." She had come back to it and Miss Latimer had fixed her in it.

"Perhaps he's fallen in love with some one else," Bevis suggested. "You've changed to that extent, after all. And you are not longing for him. Quite the contrary."

Somehow he could not control these exhibitions of his exasperation, nor could he unsay them, ashamed of them as he immediately was.

Her dark gaze rested on him at last, unresentful still, but with, at last, an almost recognized hostility. He was ashamed, yet more exasperated than ever as he saw it.

"It's almost as if you tried to insult me with my infidelity," she murmured. "It's as if, already, you had no respect for me because you know I am unfaithful. Take care, Bevis, for, after all, I may get over you."

"And I may get over you," he said, looking not at her, but at the fire and slightly wagging his remaining foot, crossed over the artificial knee.

She was very silent at that, and, shame deepening and anger dropping (it was n't anger against her; she must know that) he glanced up at her and found her gaze still on him.

"My dear," he muttered, smiling wryly, "you stick your needles too deeply into my heart. What's sport to you is death to me. — No; I don't mean

that. — All I really mean is that we must n't be like children in a nursery slapping at each other. You're as unlikely to get over me as I am to get over you, and I ask you, in deep seriousness, to accept that fact with all its implications. There it is and what are you going to do with it and with me?"

She had now risen from her seat and walked away from him, vaguely, and she went toward the third window and stood looking out.

She stood there a long time, without moving, and, remembering what she had said to him of it the other day, and of her fear, a discomfort — yet, comparatively, it was a comfort to feel it after their personal dispute — stirred him, so that, rising, with a sigh, he followed her, and, as he had done the other day, looked out over her shoulder at the cedar, the fountain, and the white fritillaries in their narrow beds. He saw from her fixed face that she had forgotten her fear of the harmless scene. Her gaze, with its new, cold grief, was straight before her.

"Tony; dear Tony," he said, laying his hand on her shoulder. She did not move or look at him.

"Let's go away," he said. "Let's leave this place. It's bad for us both. Sell it. Give it to Miss Latimer. Chuck it all, Tony, and start a new life with me. Chuck the whole ghoulish business of Malcolm and his feelings and your own infidelity. It has nothing to do with love and heaven; really it has n't. You'll see it yourself some day. Let's go away at once, darling, and get married." The urgency of what he now saw as escape was suddenly so strong in him that he really meant it, really planned, while he spoke, the Southern flight; Tony deposited at her safe London house that very evening and the license bought next day. Why not? Was n't it the only way with her? As long as she was allowed to hesitate, her feet would remain fixed in this quagmire.

She hardly heard his words; he saw that as she turned her eyes on him; but she heard his ardour and it had broken down her withdrawal.

"I'm so frightened, Bevis," she murmured. "You don't understand. You are so bitter; so cruel. You frighten me more than I can tell you. I seemed to see, just now, when you said that, about getting over me,

that I should lose your love, and his love, too; that that would be my punishment."

This, after all, was a fear easy to deal with. He passed his arm in hers and drew her from the window, feeling a foretaste of the final triumph as he did so, for, child, adorable child that she was, she had forgotten already the former fear.

"But you know what a nasty, cantankerous creature I am, darling," he said, making her walk up and down with him. "You don't really take my flings seriously. And did n't you begin! How like a woman! What a woman you are! You know that I shan't get over you. And I assure you that I don't think less well of Malcolm's fidelity."

"But the bitterness, Bevis. Why were you so bitter?" Her voice trembled. "I am never bitter with you."

"And I'm never bitter with you — though I'm a bitter person, which you are n't. You know perfectly well that it was Miss Latimer whose neck I wanted to wring. — Beastly little stone-curlew, with her stare and her wailing."

"It felt like my neck. Was it only Cicely's, then? Poor little Cicely."

"Poor little Cicely as much as you please. Only I'm sick of her, and want to get away from her, and to get you away. Seriously, Tony, why should n't we be off at once?"

"At once?" Her wavering smile, while her eyes dwelt on him, showed the plaintive sweetness of reviving confidence. "But that's impossible, dear, absurd Bevis."

"Why impossible?"

"Why I could n't get married like that; at a day's notice. And I could n't run away. I'm not afraid of Cicely, though you seem to be. And I could n't leave her like that, when I've only just arrived. It would be too unkind."

The fact that she felt it necessary to argue it all out was in itself a good augury. He could afford to relinquish his project, though he did so reluctantly. "I'm not afraid of her," he said. "Except when she frightens you."

"She does n't, Bevis. You are the only one who

frightens me; when you tell me the truth; when you tell me that I am unfaithful and that I've fallen in love with you, although my husband is n't really dead; and that perhaps, if I go on tormenting you too much, you'll get over me." She looked steadily at him while she spoke, though still she tried to smile.

"Do you want another truth, Tony?" he said, putting her hair back from her forehead, doting on her, in her loveliness, her foolishness, her pathos, while he drew her more closely to him; "it's the last that frightens you most of all, and it never can come true."

"Never? Never?" she whispered, while she, too, came closer, yielding to his arms. "Nothing can ever come between us? You will be able to take care of me, always?"

"It's all I ask," he assured her, with his dry, cherishing smile.

V

HE had learned to distrust Antonia's recoveries, but that evening it would have been difficult to believe that their troubles were not over. The very drawing-room, as they came back to it after dinner, looked, he felt, like the drawing-room of a lovely young widow who was soon to marry again. It seemed, with clustered candles, and flowers where he had never seen them before, no longer to wait upon events, but to celebrate them, and Antonia herself, standing before the fire and knitting, in absurd contrast to her bare arms and pearl-clasped hair, a charity sock, had herself an air of celebration and decision. It was for him, he felt, that her hair had been so clasped, and, as she knew he loved to see it, tossed back from her brow. For him, too, the dress as of a Charles the First lady, with falls of lace at elbow and the lace-edged cape held with diamonds and pearls at her breast. Long pearls were in her ears — he had not seen them there since before the war —

and pearls around her throat, and, beloved and unaccountable creature, why, unless in some valiant reaction to life and sanity, should she show this revival?

"What shall we do to amuse ourselves to-night, Cicely?" she asked. She had never asked it before. It had never before been a question of amusing themselves. But, though Miss Latimer, evidently, had "cried and cried," she herself was not without signs of the evening's magic. Her little pre-war dress, pathetic in its arrested fashion, its unused richness, became her. She, too, wore pearls, and she, too, oddly, with the straight line of her fringe across her forehead, recalled, all pinched and pallid though she was, the court of Charles the First. No one could have looked less likely to be amused, yet she struck him, to-night, as almost charming.

"Shall we have some dummy-bridge?" Antonia went on. "Cicely is very good at bridge, Bevis."

"By all means," said the young man, smiling across at her from the sofa where he smoked. "Shall I get a table?"

He would really rather, he felt, for a little while,

sit and smoke, his hands clasped behind his head, and watch Antonia's hands move delicately among the knitting-needles.

"Or," she went on, starting a new row of her sock, "shall it be table-turning? Cicely is good at that, too. It always turns for her. Do you remember the fun we've had with it, Cicely? The night the Austins dined and it hopped into the corner. And the night it rapped out that rude message to Mr. Foster. I feel a little stupid for bridge."

"Yes. I remember. He was very much displeased," said Miss Latimer.

"Comically displeased. He took it all so seriously — though he pretended not to mind. Do you feel like trying it, Cicely? You are the medium, of course. It never did anything without you."

Miss Latimer did not, for some moments, raise her eyes from the fire. She seemed to deliberate. When she looked up it was to say, "One hardly could, with only three."

"Why, we were only three when it went so well, with you and me and poor Mr. Foster."

"I imagine he had power."

"Well, Bevis may have power. Have you ever sat, Bevis?"

"Once or twice. I'm sure I have no power. And it's not a game I like." He felt, as he spoke, that he disliked it very much. So strongly did he dislike it that he wondered at Antonia for her suggestion.

"Why, how solemn you are, Bevis! It's only a game, as you say. I believe you really are a little scared of it, like Mr. Foster, and think it may rap out something rude. You have a guilty secret, Bevis!"

"Many, no doubt."

"You do believe in it, then? — that it's supernatural?"

From his sofa, over his cigarette-smoke, his eye at this met hers with a sort of reminder, half grim, half weary. "Still catechisms?" it asked her.

She laughed, and now he knew that in her laugh he heard bravado.

"As if a game could be!" she answered herself. "At the worst it's only Cicely's subconscious trickery. Is n't it, Cicely? Are you tired? Will you try it? I'm

longing for it now. It's just what we need. It will do us good."

"I am not tired. But why do you think a game will do us good, Antonia?" Miss Latimer asked.

Antonia looked down at her fondly; but did he not now detect the fever in her eye. "Games are good for dreary people. We are all dreary, are n't we? I know, at least, that I am. So be kind, both of you, and play with me."

"Miss Latimer is tired," said Bevis, looking across at her, feeling reluctance in her colourless replies. "And I'm tired, too. We'd both rather, far, play bridge."

But to this Miss Latimer at once said coldly: "No, I am not tired. Bridge is the more tiring of the two."

"Of course it is. We can all go to sleep around the table, if we like. It's in the corridor, is n't it? I'll get it." Antonia tossed aside her knitting and moved away.

For a moment, after she had left the room, the young man sat on, his hands still clasped behind his head, and contemplated Miss Latimer, meditating a

further appeal. But her pale little profile, fixed impassively on the fire, offered no hint of response. Much as she might dislike the game, she would never take sides with him against Antonia. Any appeal that might be made must be to Antonia herself, and, after the moment's pause, he rose and limped after her.

She was outside in the broad balustraded corridor from which one looked down into the hall, and she had lifted a bowl of flowers from a little mahogany table that stood there.

Bevis closed the door behind him. He, also, laid his hands on the table, arresting her.

"Tony," he said, "give it up." The door was closed, but he spoke in a low voice. "I don't like it."

"Why not?" She, too, spoke in a low voice; and she stood still, her eyes on his.

"I don't like it," he repeated. "It's not right. Not now. After what's happened in these years."

Oh, what a blunder! What a cursed blunder! He saw, as he spoke the words, the fire they lighted in her. She had been an actress, dressed for a part, pre-

tending gaiety and revival to inveigle him into an experiment. Over the table, her hands hard grasped upon the edge, she kept her eyes fixed on him.

"You *do* believe in it, then? — That the spirits of the dead speak through it?"

Cursed blunder! How pale she had become, as if beneath the actress's rouge. There was no laughter left, or pretence of gaiety.

"No: I don't believe it's spirits. I believe, as you said, that it's subconscious trickery. And it's not a time to mess about with it. That's all. It's ugly: out of place."

"If it's only that — subconscious trickery — that's what I believe too — why should you mind so much; — or even ugliness?"

"And why should you want so much to do it, if that's all you believe? It's because you believe more, or are afraid of more, that I ask you to give it up."

"But is n't that the very reason why you should consent? So that my mind may be set at rest? Don't be angry with me, Bevis. That frightens me more

than anything — as you told me. I am not afraid of this, unless you make me so by taking it so seriously."

She had him there, neatly. And why should he mind so much? He did mind, horridly. But that was all the more reason for pretending not to.

"Very well," he said dryly. "I'm not angry. I don't consent, though; I submit. Here; let me carry it for you."

But he had forgotten his leg. He stumbled as he lifted the table and could only help Antonia carry it into the room and set it down before the fire.

"There; it will do nicely there," said Antonia. "And those three little chairs." Her voice was still unsteady.

Miss Latimer looked round at them as they entered, and then rose. "Is n't this table a little rickety?" she asked, placing her finger-tips upon it and slightly shaking it.

"It's the one we always use," said Antonia. "It's quite solid. If you wanted to tip it, you could n't."

"I've seen larger and firmer tables tipped, by peo-

ple who wanted to," said Miss Latimer. "I have, I am sorry to say, often seen people cheat at table-turning."

"You don't suspect Bevis, or me, I hope!" laughed Antonia, taking her place.

"Not at all. But people don't suspect themselves," said Miss Latimer. She, too, sat down.

"It's very good of you, of both of you, to humour me," said Antonia, still laughing. "I promise you both not to cheat."

"Shall I put out the lamps?" asked Bevis coldly.

And it was still Antonia who directed the installation, replying: "Oh, no; that's not at all necessary. We have never sat in the dark. It was broad daylight, before tea, with Mr. Foster."

Bevis took his place and they laid hands lightly upon the table.

"And we may go on talking," Antonia added.

But they did not talk. As if the very spirit of dumbness had emanated from their outspread hands, they sat silent and Bevis felt at once the muffled rhythm of their hearts beating in syncopated meas-

ure. The pulsations were heavy in his finger-tips and seemed to be sending little electric currents into the wood beneath them. Observant, sceptical, and, with it all, exasperated, he watched himself and felt sure that soon the table, yielding to some interplay of force, would begin to tip. Long moments passed, however, and it did not stir, and after his first intense anticipation his attention dropped, with a sense of comparative relief, to more familiar uses. He had not looked at either of his companions, but he now became aware of them, of their breathing and their heart-beats, with an intimacy which, he felt, turning his thoughts curiously, savoured of the unlawful. People were not meant to be aware of each other after such a fashion, with consciousness fallen far below the normal mental meeting-ground to the fundamental crucibles of the organism, where the physical machinery and the psychical personality became so mysteriously intermingled. There, in the first place — it pleased him to trace it out, and he was glad to keep his mind occupied — there lay the basis of his objection to the ambiguous pastime. As he

meditated it, his awareness of this intimacy became so troubling that, withdrawing his thoughts from it decisively, he fixed them upon the mere visual perception of Antonia's hands, and Miss Latimer's. Miss Latimer's were small, dry, light. The thumb curled back, the palm was broad, the finger-tips were squared, though narrow. He had no link with them, no clue to them, and, though he strove to see them as objects only, as pale patterns on the dark wood, he was aware, disagreeably, that he shrank from them and their hidden yet felt significance.

Antonia's hands he knew so well. But he was not to rest in the mere contemplation of their beauty. Everywhere, to-night, the veils of appearance were melting before the emergence of operative yet, till now, unrecognized reality; and so it was that Antonia's hands, as he looked at them, ceased to express her soft, sweet life, its delicacy, its mournfulness, its merriment, and, like the breathing and the heart-beats, conveyed to him the mysterious and fundamental sources of her being, all in her most potent and most unconscious. Laid out upon the darkness,

they were piteous hands; helpless and abandoned to destiny.

And his own? Small, delicately fashioned, if resolute, they expressed his own personality in what it had of closest and most alien. He did not like himself, seen at these close quarters, or, rather, he frightened himself. The physical machinery was too fragile an apparatus in his construction. It did not secure him sufficiently. It did not sufficiently secure Antonia. Nerves rather than flesh and blood made his strength, and flesh and blood, dogged, confident, and blind, was a better barrier against fear than mere intelligence. There was more fear in him now than in Antonia, or he was more aware of what was to be feared — which came to the same thing. While she wandered sadly in dreams and abandoned herself to peril because she did not know where peril lay, he saw and felt reality, sharply, subtly, like a scent upon the breeze, like a shadow cast by an unseen presence; and because he was so subtle, so conscious, and so resolute, he was responsible. That was what it came to for him, with a suddenness that had

in it an element of physical shock. It was he alone who saw where peril lay and he alone who could withhold Antonia from thus spreading her spirit upon the darkness.

He looked back at her hands and a pang of terror sped through him. Something had happened to them; something had passed from them, or into them. He was an ass, of course, an impressionable, nervous ass; yet he saw them as doomed, unresisting creatures; and, while he still controlled himself to think, feeling himself infected with the virus of the horrid game, the table suddenly, as if with a long-drawn, welling sigh, stirred, rose — he felt it rising under his fingers — and slowly tipped toward Miss Latimer.

It was then Antonia who said, as if with frivolity, "We're off!" Miss Latimer sat silent, her head bent down in an attitude brooding and remote.

The table, returning to the level, after a pause rocked slowly to and fro. "Cicely, if it raps, will you say the alphabet for it, while I spell?" Antonia murmured. He recognized the forced commonplace of her voice. Miss Latimer bowed her head in answer.

The table rocked more and more violently. Antonia had half to rise in her chair to keep her hands upon it as it tipped from her toward Miss Latimer. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, it was still, and then he heard a soft yet sharp report, as if of a small electric shock in the very wood itself. — One, two, three; a pause; and — One, two, three, again. A rhythm distinct and detestable.

Conjecture raced through his mind. He had said that he had played the game; but he had only seen the table turned and tipped; he had never heard these sounds. Unable to distrust his senses, though aware that any one else's he would have distrusted, he located them in the very wood under their hands. They did not come from Miss Latimer's toe-joints; nor from his or Tony's. Well, what of it? It was some oddity of magnetism, like the tipping, and, now that the experience was actually upon them, he felt, rather than any panic, a dry, almost a light curiosity, seeing, with relief for his delay, that to have interfered, to have stopped the game and made a row, would have been to dignify it and fix it in Tony's unsatisfied

mind stamped with a fear more definite than any she had felt.

"Are you there?" Miss Latimer was saying, in a prim, automatic voice, as of one long accustomed to these communions — "One for No, and three for Yes and two for Uncertain. Is that agreed?"

The table rapped three times.

"Are you ready? Shall I begin the alphabet?"

Again three raps.

Her voice now altered. It was almost dreamily, with head bent down, that she began, evenly, to enumerate the letters. "A, B" — a rap fell neatly at the second sound. "B," Antonia announced. Miss Latimer resumed: "A, B, C, D, E" — another rap arrested her.

"Oh — it is going to be 'Bevis'! — It's for you, Bevis!" Antonia murmured.

"Rap!" said the table.

"That is No. It is not for Captain Saltonhall," said Miss Latimer drowsily and, drowsily, she took up the alphabet. The table, uninterrupted by any comment, spelled out the word, "Beside."

"Beside. How odd," said Antonia.

It was very wearisome. Already they seemed to have sat there for hours. His fear had not returned; but curiosity no longer consciously sustained him. An insufferable languor, rather, fell upon him and fumes of sleep seemed to coil heavily about his eyelids. He wished he could have a cigarette. He wished the thing would go more quickly and be over.

"T,H,E," had been spelled out and Antonia had reported "the." Miss Latimer's drugged voice had taken up the alphabet again and the table had rapped at "F."

Now the word demanded nearly the whole alphabet for the finding of its letters. "O" came. Then "U."

Antonia sat still. Her eyes were fixed, strangely, devouringly, upon Miss Latimer, whose head, drooping forward, seemed that of a swooning person. "F,O,U,N,T," she spelt.

Not till then did it flash upon him, and it came from Antonia's face rather than from the half-forgotten phrase.

He sprang up, stumbling, nearly falling, catching

at Antonia's shoulder to right himself. "Stop the damned thing!" he exclaimed, and he lifted her hands. "It's quoting you!"

Miss Latimer's hands slid into her lap. She sat as if profoundly asleep.

Antonia rose from her place, and at last she looked at him. "Beside the fountain. Beside the fountain. He is there," she said.

He had seized her arms now as if to hold her back more forcibly.

"Nonsense!" he cried loudly. "Miss Latimer is a medium — as you know. Her subconsciousness got at yours. They are the words you used the other morning."

"He is there," she repeated; "and I must see him. He has come for me. And I must see him."

He held her for a moment longer, measuring his fear by hers. Then, releasing her, "Very well," he said. "I'll come too. We shall see nothing." But he was not sure.

They crossed the room, Antonia swiftly going before him. She paused so that he might come up with

her before she drew back the curtain from the third window. The moon was high. The cedar was black against the brightness. They looked down into the flagged garden and saw the empty moonlight. Empty. Nothing was there.

"Are you satisfied?" Bevis asked her. He placed his arm around her waist and a passionate triumph filled him. Empty. They were safe.

Motionless within his grasp she stared and stared and found nothing. Only the fountain was there, a thin spear of wavering light, and the fritillaries, rising like ghosts from their narrow beds.

"Are you satisfied?" Bevis repeated. They seemed measurelessly alone there at the exorcised window, alone, after the menace, as they had never been. He held her closely while they looked out, putting his other arm around her, too, as if for final security. "Will you come away with me to-morrow?" he whispered.

She looked at him. No; it was not triumph yet. Her eyes were empty; but of him, too. They showed him only a blank horror.

"What does it mean?" she said.

Dropping the curtain behind them, he looked round at Miss Latimer. Had she just moved forward? Or for how long had she been leaning like that on the table, her head upon her arms?

"It means her," he said. "She read your fear; she saw it. Have you had enough of it, Tony? Have you done playing with madness?"

"How could she read my fear? I was not thinking of it. I had forgotten it. It was not she. It came from something else." She was shuddering within his arms, and her eyes, with their devouring question, were on the seated figure.

"No, it did n't. From nothing else at all. It came from you and from me — and from her; all of us together. It was some power in her that conveyed it to our senses."

"You, I, and she — and something else," said Antonia. She drew away from him and went toward the fire, but so unsteadily that she had to pause and lay her hand on a chair as she went. At the table she stopped. Miss Latimer still sat fallen forward upon it. Silently Antonia stood looking at her.

"She's asleep, I think," said Bevis. He wished that she were dead. "It has exhausted her."

Antonia put out her hand and touched her. "It never was like this before. — Yes," she said, after a pause, "she is breathing very quietly. She must be asleep. And I will go now."

She moved away swiftly; but, striding after her, he caught her at the door, seizing her hand on the lock.

"What do you want?" she said, stopping still and looking at him.

He said nothing for a moment. "You must n't be alone," he then answered.

"What do you mean?" she repeated, and she continued to look at him with a cold gentleness. "I must be alone."

"I must come with you. I make my claim; in spite of what you feel; for your sake."

Still with the cold gentleness, she shook her head. "You don't understand," she said. "You could n't say that, if you understood. Good-night."

When she had closed the door behind her, he stood

beside it for a long moment, wondering, even still, if he should not follow her. Then he remembered Miss Latimer, sleeping there — or was she sleeping? — behind him. He went back round the screen. She had not stirred and, after looking at her for a moment, he leaned over her, as Antonia had done, and listened. She was breathing slowly and deeply, but now he felt sure that she was not asleep. The pretence was a refuge she had taken against revelations overpowering to her as well as to Antonia. She was not asleep, and should he leave her alone in the now haunted room?

Restless, questioning, he limped up and down; and, going again to the window, he drew the curtain and again looked out. Nothing. Of course nothing. Only the fountain and the white fritillaries, strange, ghostly, pallid, and brooding. Well, they would get through the night. To-morrow should be the end of it. He promised himself, as he turned away, that Antonia should come with him to-morrow.

VI

HE heard, as he waked next morning, that it was heavily raining. When he looked out, the trees stood still in grey sheets of straightly falling rain. There was no wind.

The mournful, obliterated scene did not oppress him. The weather was all to the good, he thought. He had always liked a rainy day in the country; and ghosts don't walk in the rain. If Malcolm had n't come in the moonlight, he would n't come now. He felt sunken, exhausted, and rather sick; yet his spirits were not bad. He was fit for the encounter with Antonia.

When he went down to the dark dining-room, darker than ever to-day, he found only one place laid. The maid told him that both the ladies were breakfasting in their rooms. This was unexpected and disconcerting. But he made the best of it, and drank his coffee and ate kedgeree and toast with not too bad an appetite. A little coal fire had been lighted in

the library, and he went in there after breakfast and read the papers and wrote some letters, and the morning passed not too heavily. But, at luncheon-time, his heart sank, almost to the qualm of the night before, when he found still only one place laid. After half an hour of indecision over his cigarette, he wrote a note and sent it up to Antonia.

"*Dearest Tony*, You don't want to drive me away, I suppose? Because I don't intend to go. When am I to see you? I hope you are n't unwell? Yours ever, BEVIS."

The answer was brought with the smallest delay.

"*Dearest Bevis*, I'm not ill, only so dreadfully tired. Cicely will give you your tea and dine with you. I will see you to-morrow. Yours ever, TONY."

This consoled him much, though not altogether. And the handwriting puzzled him. He had never seen Tony write like that before. He could infer from the slant of the letters that she had written in bed; but it was in a hand cramped and controlled, as though with surely unnecessary thought and effort.

He was horridly lonely all the afternoon.

Tea was brought into the library and with it came Miss Latimer. She wore rain-dashed tweeds and under her battered black felt hat her hair was beaded with rain. At once he saw that she was altered. It was not that she was more pale than usual; less pale, indeed, for she had a spot of colour on each cheek, but, as if her being had gathered itself together, for some emergency, about its irreducible core of flame, she showed, to his new perception of her, an aspect at once ashen and feverish; and even though in her entrance she was composed, if that were possible, beyond her wont, his subtle sense of change detected in her self-mastery something desperate and distraught.

She did not look at him as she went to the tea-table, drawing off her wet gloves. The table had been placed before the fire, and Bevis, who had risen on her entrance, dropped again into his seat, the capacious leather divan set at right angles to the hearth, its back to the window. Miss Latimer, thus, facing him across the table as she measured out the

tea, was illuminated by such dying light as the sombre evening still afforded.

They had murmured a conventional greeting and he now asked her if she'd been out walking in this bad weather. It was some relief to see that she had not been with Tony the whole day through.

"Only down to the village," she said. "There is a woman ill there."

He went on politely to enquire if she were n't very wet and would not rather change before tea —he would n't mind waiting a bit; but she said, seating herself and pouring on the boiling water, that she was used to being wet and did not notice it.

He was determined not to speak of Antonia and to ask no questions. To ask questions would be to recognize the new bond between her and Antonia. But, unasked, emphasizing to his raw consciousness his own exclusion, she said: "Antonia is so sorry to leave you alone like this. She had one of her bad nights and thought a complete rest would do her good."

He reflected that it was more dignified to show strength by generosity and to play into her hands. "Does she have bad nights?" he asked.

"Oh, very. Did n't you know?" said Miss Latimer. "She's obliged to take things."

"Drugs, do you mean?" He had not known at all. "That's very bad for her."

"Very bad. But her doctor allows it apparently."

"She took one last night and it did no good?"

"None at all. I hope she is getting a little sleep now. Sugar?" Miss Latimer poised a lump before him in the tongs and, on his assent, dropped it into his cup. Could two creatures have looked more cosy, shut, for the blind-man's-holiday hour, into the tranquil intimacy of the studious room, with the even glow of its tended fire, the cheer of its humming kettle, the scented promise of its tea-table? She passed him toasted scones from the hot-water-basin and offered home-made jam. He wanted no jam, but he found himself quite hungry, absurdly so, he thought, until he remembered that he had really eaten no lunch. He was coming, now that the opening had been made,

and while he ate his scone, to a new decision. It was the moment, and perhaps the only one he would have, for finding out just how much she counted against him. He determined, if it were necessary, on open warfare.

"I don't think Wyndwards suits Tony," he said.

"Don't you?" Miss Latimer returned, but quite without impertinence. "She's always been very well here before."

"Before what?"

"Her husband's death," Miss Latimer replied.

"Yes," said Bevis, disconcerted. "Well, it's that, perhaps."

"It is that undoubtedly," said Miss Latimer. Her voice, high and piping, was as dry and emotionless as her horrid little hands. What control it showed that it should be so! He felt that he hated her; hated her the more that she was not wishing to score off him as he wished to score off her. Yet he did not dislike her, if one could draw that distinction. And now he noticed, as she lifted her cup, that her hand trembled, as if with the slight, incessant shaking of palsy. The

fear of an emergency burned in her. He felt sure that she, too, had not slept.

"Well, it all comes to the same thing, does n't it?" he said. "Since Malcolm's death the place oppresses her. Quite naturally; and it would be much better that she should leave it; as soon as possible."

"I don't think it would do Antonia any good to leave Wyndwards," said Miss Latimer, not looking at him.

"You think it would do her good if I did, I imagine," Bevis commented, with his dry laugh. "Thanks awfully."

She sat silent.

"You saw, of course, last night, how it was with us," he said. "Perhaps you saw it before."

Still she was silent, and for so long that he thought she might not be going to answer him. But she replied at last. "No; not before. I did not suspect it before."

Ah! He had an inner triumph. She had n't had her head down all the time; he was sure of it now. She had, when they went to the window, watched them.

He did not quite know why this certainty should give him the sense of triumph; unless — was that it? — it pointed to some plotting secret instinct in her. "Yet you must have wondered how I came to be here — so intimately," he said.

"No; I did not wonder," said Miss Latimer. "I know that young women nowadays have friendships like that. I knew that you had been Malcolm's friend."

"You did not see that it was more than friendship till last night?"

She paused, but only for a moment. "I saw that you were in love with her from the first."

"But only last night saw that we were in love with each other?"

Again she did not reply. Turning her head slightly aside, as if in distaste for the intimacies he forced upon her, she took up the tea-pot and, still with that slightly, incessantly, shaking hand, poured herself out a second cup of tea.

He would not pause for her distaste. "I am afraid you dislike it very much."

To this she replied, "I dislike anything that makes Antonia unhappy."

He owned that it was a good answer. Leaning back in the divan, his foot crossed over his knee, his hand holding his ankle, he contemplated his antagonist. "My point is that it would n't make her unhappy if she came away," he took up. "If she came away and married me at once. It's the place and its associations that have got upon her nerves. — How much you saw last night!"

She had poured out the cup and she raised it automatically to her lips while he spoke. Then, untasted, she set it down, and then, with the effect of a pale, sudden glare, her eyes were at last upon him.

"I do not know what you mean by nerves. Antonia is not as light as you imagine," she said. "She loved her husband. She does not find it easy to forget him here, it is true; but I do not think she would find it easy if she left his home with another man."

"No one asks her to forget him," said Bevis. She could not drink her tea, but he passed his cup, blessing the bland ritual that made soft, sliding links in an

encounter all harsh, had it been unaccompanied, with the embarrassment of their antagonism. "May I have another cup, please?" There was a malicious satisfaction, too, in falling back upon the ritual at such a moment. "With a little water? — I cared for Malcolm. I have no intention of forgetting him."

Her eyes were still on him, and distraction, almost desperation, was working in her, for, though she took his cup as automatically as she had lifted her own, though she proceeded to fill it, it was, he noted with an amusement that almost expressed itself in a laugh — he knew that he was capable of feeling amusement at the most unlikely times and places! — with the boiling water only. She put in milk and sugar and handed it to him, unconscious of the absurdity.

"I did not mean in that sense," she said.

"I should like to know what you do mean." He drank his milk and water. "I should like to know where I am with you. Do you dislike me? Are you my enemy? Or is it merely that you are passionately opposed to remarriages?"

She rose as he asked his questions as if the close-

ness of his pursuit had become too intolerable. "I do not know you. How could I be your enemy? I only dislike you, because you make Antonia unhappy."

"Would you like me if I made her happy?"

The pale glare was in her eyes as she faced him, her hands on the back of her chair. "You can never make her happy. Never. Never," she repeated. "You can only mean unhappiness to her. If you care for her, if you have any real love for her, you will go away, now, at once, and leave her in peace."

"So you say. So you think. It's a matter of opinion. I don't agree with you. I don't believe it would be to leave her in peace. You forget that we're in love with each other." He, too, had risen, but in his voice, as he opposed her, there was appeal rather than antagonism. "Let us understand each other. Is it that you hate so much the idea of remarriages? Do you feel them to be infidelities?"

She had turned from him, but she paused now by the door, and it was as if, arrested by the appeal, she was willing to do justice to his mere need for enlightenment. "Not if people care more for some one else."

Care more? He did not echo her phrase, but he meditated, and then, courageously, accepted it. "And if they can, you don't hate it?"

At that she just glanced at him. He seemed to see the caged prisoner pass behind his bars and look out in passing; and he saw not only what her hate could be, but the dark and lonely anguish that encompassed her.

"People should be true to themselves," was all she said.

When she was gone, Bevis, characteristically, went back to the table and made himself a proper cup of tea. He had managed to make tea for himself and a wounded Tommy when he had lain, with his shattered leg, in No Man's Land.

VII

MISS LATIMER did not come to dinner and he was thankful for it, though there was little to be thankful for, he felt, as he sat in the library afterwards and wondered what Tony was thinking of there in the darkness above him, if she were alone and in the dark. The thought that she was not, the thought that Miss Latimer, with her stone-curlew eyes and pallid, brooding face, was with her made him restless. He could not read. He threw his book aside and stared into the fire.

Next morning the rain had ceased and it was cold and sunny. He found Miss Latimer in the dining-room when he went down. She was already dressed for going out and had started her breakfast. "My poor friend in the village is dying," she said, "and has asked for me. I have a message to you from Antonia. She is still resting this morning, but will come down at three, if you will be in the library then."

Her courteous terseness put barriers between them; but none were needed. He could not have asked questions or appealed this morning. He imagined, though he had looked at his face in the mirror with unregarding eyes, that he, too, was perceptibly aged, and his main feeling about Miss Latimer was that she was old and ugly and that he was sick of her.

After breakfast he went out into the hard, bright air.

He walked about the grounds and found himself looking at the house with consciously appraising eyes, from the lawn, from the ring-court, from the kitchen-garden. It was a solid, tasteful, graceful structure; mild, with its sunny façade looking to the moors; cheerful, with its gable-ends; but as he had felt it at the first he felt it now more decisively as empty of tradition and tenderness. It had remained, too, so singularly new; perhaps because, in its exposed situation, none of the trees carefully disposed about it had yet grown to a proportionate height. Yes, notwithstanding the passion and grief now burning within its walls, it was impersonal, unlovable; and it

would need centuries, in spite of the care and love lavished upon it, to gain a soul.

He knew, as he walked, that he was taking comfort from these reflections and was vexed that he should need them. He had completely placed, psychologically, if not scientifically, the events of the other evening, and it was not necessary that he should be satisfied that Wyndwards was a place to which the supernatural could not attach itself. Yet that desire, indubitably, directed his wanderings, and he could compute its power by the strength of the reluctance he felt for visiting the flagged garden where, if anywhere, the element he thankfully missed might lurk. But when, putting an ironic compulsion upon himself, he had entered the little enclosure, his main impression, as before, was one of mere beauty. It was the only corner of Wyndwards that had achieved individuality; the placing of the fountain, the stone bench, the beds among the flags, was a pleasure to the eye. And like a harbinger of good cheer, he heard, from the branches of the budding wood beyond the garden wall, the wiry, swinging notes of a chiff-

chaff, and his own soul as well as the flagged garden seemed exorcised by that assured and reiterated gladness. Ghosts, in a world where chiff-chaffs sang, were irrelevancies, even if they walked. And they did not walk. In sunlight as in moonlight he found the flagged garden empty.

He sat down on the stone bench for a little while and watched the fountain and listened to the chiff-chaff, while he lighted a cigarette and told himself that the day was pleasant. With reiteration the bird's monotonous little utterance lost its special message for him and dropped to an accompaniment to thoughts that, if unhaunted, were not happy, in spite of the pleasant day. He felt that he hated silent, sunny Wyndwards. He cursed the impulse that had brought Antonia there, and him after her. It had seemed at the time the most natural of things that his young widowed friend should ask him to pay her a spring visit in her new home. His courtship of her, laconic, implicit, patient, had prolonged itself through the dreary London winter following the Armistice, and springtime on the moors had seemed

full of promise to his hopes. Alas! why had they not stayed in safe, dear, dingy London, London of tubes and shops and theatres, of people and clever tea- and dinner-tables? There one lived sanely in the world of the normal consciousness, one's personality hedged round by activity and convention from the vagrant and disintegrating influences of the subliminal, or the subconscious, whichever it might have been that had infernally played the trick of the other evening. He sat there, poking with his stick at the crevices between the flags, and the song of the chiff-chaff was his only comfort.

Miss Latimer did not return to lunch, and he was in the library waiting for Tony long before the appointed hour. She came before it struck, softly and suddenly entering, turning without a pause to close the door behind her, not looking at him as she went to the fire and leaned there, her hand upon the mantelpiece. She was dressed in black, a flowing gown with wide sleeves that invested her with an unfamiliar, invalided air; but her hair was beautifully wreathed and she wore her little high-heeled satin shoes, tying

about the instep. For a moment she stood looking down into the fire; then, as she raised her face, he saw the change in her.

"Why, Tony," he said gently, "you look very ill."

Her eyes only met his for a moment and, instinctively, he kept the distance they measured.

"I'm not very well," she said. "I have n't been able to sleep. Not for these two nights."

"Not at all?"

"Not at all."

"Don't take drugs," he said after a moment. "Miss Latimer tells me that you take drugs. I did n't know it."

"It's very seldom," she said, with a faint, deprecatory smile. "I'm very careful."

Still he felt that he could not approach her, and it was with a sense of the unmeet, or at all events the irrelevant, that he helplessly fell back on verbal intimacy. "You could, I am sure, sleep in the train to-night; with me to look after you."

She said nothing to this for a moment, but then replied, as though she had really thought it over:

"Not to-night; Cicely won't get back in time. Her poor woman is dying; she could n't leave her. But to-morrow; I intend to go to-morrow; with Cicely."

"Leaving me here?" he enquired, with something of his own dryness, so that, again with the faint, defensive smile, she said: "Oh — you must come with us; we will all go together; as far as London. We are going down to Cornwall, Bevis, to some cousins of Cicely's near Fowey."

He came then, after a little silence, and leaned at the other end of the mantelpiece. "What's the matter, Tony?" he asked. He had not, in his worst imaginings, imagined this. She had never before spoken as though they were, definitely, to go different ways. And she stood looking down into the fire as if she could not meet his eyes. "You see," he said, but he felt it to be useless, "I was right about that wretched table business. It's that that has made you ill."

"Yes; it's because of that," she said.

"You must let me talk to you about it," he went on. "I can explain it all, I think."

"It is explained," she said. Her voice was cold and gentle, cold, it seemed to him, with the immensity of some blank vastness of distance that divided them. And a cold presage fell upon him, of what he could not say; or would not.

"You would not explain it as I would," he said. "You must listen to me and not to Miss Latimer."

"It is all explained, Bevis," she repeated. "It was true. What it said was true."

"How do you mean, true?" he asked, and he heard the presage in his voice.

"He is there," she said, and now he knew why she was far from him, and what the stillness was that wrapped her round. "He comes. Cicely has seen him. She saw him there that night. Beside the fountain."

It was, he saw it now, what he had expected, and his heart stood still to hear it. Then he said: "You mean that she tells you she sees him; that she thinks she sees him; since he's come just as you led her to expect he would, and just where."

She shook her head gently and her downcast face kept its curious, considering look. "It was n't I, nor

you, nor Cicely. He was with us. We could see nothing, you and I. He could not show himself to us; we had put ourselves too far from him. But when we left her alone, Cicely went to the window and saw him standing in the moonlight. He was not looking up at her, but down at the fritillaries. She and he planted them there together, before we were married. And all the while she looked, he stayed there, not moving and plainly visible. I knew it. I knew he was there when I looked, although I could see nothing." She spoke with an astonishing and terrifying calm.

"And she came at once and told you this? That night?"

"Not that night. She went down into the garden. She thought he might speak to her. But he was gone. And when she came back and looked from the window, he was gone. No; it was next morning she told me. She tried not to tell; but I made her."

"Curious," said Bevis after a silence, "that she could have talked to me yesterday afternoon, and given me my tea, as if all this had never happened."

But he knew as he spoke that it had not been so with Miss Latimer. Something had happened; he had seen it when she was with him; and he now knew what it had been.

Gibes and scepticism fell as idly upon Antonia as faint rain. She was unaware of them. "No; she would never speak to you about it. There was no surprise in it for her, Bevis. She has always felt him there. When we went to the window she thought that we should surely see him, and when we did not, she pretended to sleep, purposely, so that we should go and leave her to look out. It comforted her to see him. It was only for me she was frightened."

"Yes; I rather suspected that," he muttered. "That she was shamming. I did n't want to leave her there alone."

"You could n't have kept her from him always, Bevis," Antonia said gently. "If it had not been then, she would have seen him last night, I am sure; because I am sure he intended her to see him, meant and longed for it. But it was only the one time. Last night he was not there."

He left the fire and took a turn or two up and down the room. His thoughts were divided against themselves. Did he feel, now, when, after all, the worst had happened, less fear, or more, than he had felt? Did he believe that Miss Latimer had lied? Did he believe Malcolm had appeared to her? And if Malcolm had, in very truth, appeared, did it make any difference? After all, what difference did it make?

"Tony," he said presently, and really in a tone of ordinary argument, "you say it was only for you she was frightened. What frightened her, for you?"

She thought this over for a little while. "Was n't it natural?" she said at last. "She knew how I should feel it."

"In what way feel it?"

"She knew that until then I had not really believed him still existing," said Antonia, with her cold, downcast face. "Not as she believed it; not even as you did. She knew what it must mean."

"That when you really believed, it must part us?"

"Not only that. Perhaps that, alone, would not have parted us. But that he should come back."

Still she did not look at him, and he continued to limp up and down, his eyes, also, downcast. He, too, was seeing Malcolm standing there, beside the fountain, as he had seen him when first Antonia had told him of her fear. He had visualized her thoughts on that first day; and though, while they sat at the table, he had not remembered Tony's fear, it had doubtless been its doubled image that had printed itself from their minds upon Miss Latimer's clairvoyant brain. But now, seeing his dead friend, as he always thought of him, the whole and happy creature, a painful memory suddenly assailed him, challenging this peaceful picture of Malcolm's ghost; and he was aware, as it came, as he dwelt on it, of a stir of hope, a tightening of craft, in his veins and along his nerves. Subtlety, after all, might serve better than flesh and blood. This, he was sure, was a memory not till then recalled at Wyndwards; and it might strangely help him.

"Tony, how was Malcolm dressed when she saw him?" he asked.

"In his uniform." He had avoided looking at her

in asking his question, but he heard from her voice that she suspected nothing. "As he must have been when he was killed."

As he must have been when he was killed. Tony had played into his hands.

"Bareheaded, or with his cap?"

She did not answer at once, and, raising his eyes, he saw that now she was looking at him. "Bareheaded. Yes," she assented. And she repeated, "As he was when he was killed, Bevis."

"Did he look pale? — unhappy?"

"Very calm," she said.

"Nothing more?" He had his reasons; but, alas, she had hers.

Her eyes dwelt on him as she answered: "Yes. Something more. Something I did not know. Something Cicely did not know." She measured what he kept from her, with what a depth of melancholy, seeing his hope; as he, abandoning hope, measured what she had, till then, kept from him. "They told me that Malcolm was shot through the heart, Bevis. It was not only that. I don't know why they felt it

kinder to say that. They told you the truth. There was something more. You do know," she said. Her eyes were on his and he could not look away, though he felt, sickening him, that a dull flush crept revealingly to his face.

"I know what?" he repeated, stupidly.

"How he was killed. That's what Cicely saw."

"She got it from my mind," he muttered, while the flush, that felt like an exposure of guilt, dyed his face and, despite his words, horror settled round his heart. "She's a *clairvoyante.* She got the khaki from us both and the wound in the head from me."

Now her eyes dropped from him. He had revealed nothing to her, except his own hope of escape. He had brought further evidence; but it was not needed. She was a creature fixed and frozen in an icy block of certainty.

"A wound in the head," she repeated. "A terrible wound. That was what Cicely saw. He must have died at once. How did you know, Bevis? You were not with him."

"Alan Chichester told me," said the young man hoarsely. "The other was true too. The shot in the breast would have been enough to kill him. It was instantaneous; the most merciful death. And he was not disfigured, Tony."

She rested pitying eyes upon him. She pitied him. "His features were not touched; not on the side he turned to her," she answered. "But Cicely saw that half his head was shot away."

His busy mind, while they spoke, was nimbly darting here and there with an odd, agile avoidance of certain recognitions. This was the moment of moments in which to show no fear. And his mind was not afraid. — Clairvoyance; clairvoyance; it repeated, while the horror clotted round his heart. As if pushing against a weight he forced his will through the horror and went back to his place at the other end of the mantelpiece; and, with a conscious volition, he put his hand on hers and drew it from the shelf. "Tony dear," he said, "come sit down. Let us talk quietly." — Heaven knew they had been quiet enough! — "Here; let me keep beside you. Don't

take your hand away. I shan't trouble you. Listen, dear. Even if it were true, even if Malcolm came — and I do not believe he comes — it need not mean that we must part."

She had suffered him to draw her down beside him on the leathern divan and, as she felt his kindly hand upon her and heard his voice, empty of all but an immense gentleness, tears, for the first time, rose to her eyes. Slowly they fell down her cheeks and she sat there, mute, and let them fall.

"Why should you think it means he wants to part us?" he asked in a gentle and exhausted voice. He asked, for he must still try to save himself and Tony; yet he knew that Miss Latimer had indeed done something to him; or that Malcolm had. The wraith of that inscrutability hovered between him and Tony, and in clasping her would he not always clasp its chill? The springs of ardour in his heart were killed. Never had he more loved and never less desired her. Poor, poor Tony. How could she live without him? And wretched he, how was he to win her back from this antagonist?

He had asked his question, but she knew his thoughts.

"He has parted us, Bevis. We are parted. You know it, too."

"I don't! I don't!" Holding her hand he looked down at it while his heart mocked the protestation. "I don't know it. Life can cover this misery. We must be brave, and face it together."

"It can't be faced together. He would be there, always. Seeing us."

"We want him to be there; happy; loving you; loving your happiness."

"It is not like that, Bevis." She only needed to remind him. The reality before them mocked his words. "He would not have called to us if he were happy. He would not have appeared to Cicely. He is not angry. I understand it all. He is trying to get through, but it is not because he is angry. It is because he feels I have gone from him. He is lonely, Bevis; and lost. Like the curlew. Like the poor, forgotten curlew."

When she said that, something seemed to break

in his heart, if there were anything left to break. He sat for a little while, still looking down at the hand he held, the piteous, engulfed hand. But it was a pity not only for her, but for himself, and, unendurably, for Malcolm, in that vision she evoked, that brought the slow tears to his eyes. And then thought and feeling seemed washed away from him and he knew only that he had laid his head upon her shoulder, as if in great weariness, and sobbed.

"Oh, my darling!" whispered Tony. She put her arms around him. "Oh, my darling Bevis. I've broken your heart, too. Oh, what grief! What misery!"

She had never spoken to him like that before; never clasped him to her. He had a beautiful feeling of comfort and contentment, even while, with her, he felt the waters closing over their heads.

"Darling Tony," he said. He added after a moment, "My heart's not broken when you are so lovely to me."

Pressing her cheek against his forehead, kissing

him tenderly, she held him as a mother holds her child. "I'd give my life for you," she said. "I'd die to make you happy."

"Ah, but you see," he put his hand up to her shoulder so that he should feel her more near, "that would n't do any good. You must stay like this to make me happy."

"If I could!" she breathed.

They sat thus for a long time and, in the stillness, sweetness, sorrow, he felt that it was he and Tony who lay drowned in each other's arms at the bottom of the sea, dead and peaceful, and Malcolm who lived and roved so restlessly, in the world from which they were mercifully sunken. They were the innocent ghosts and he the baleful, living creature haunting their peace.

"Don't go. Why do you go?" he said, almost with terror, as Antonia's arms released him. She had opened her eyes; but not to him. Their cold, fixed grief gazed above his head. And the faint, deprecatory smile flickered about her mouth as, rising, she said: "I must. Cicely will soon be back. And I

must rest again. I must rest for to-morrow, Bevis dear."

"We are all going away together? You will really rest?"

"All going away. Yes; I will rest." Still she did not look at him, but around at the room. "I shall never see Wyndwards again."

"Forget it, Tony, and all it's meant. That's what I am going to do. I am to travel with you?"

She hesitated; then, "Of course. You and I and Cicely," she said.

"And I may see you in London? You'll take a day or two there before going on?"

"A day or two, perhaps. But you must not try to see me, Bevis dear." He had risen, still keeping her hand as he went with her to the door, still feeling himself the bereft and terrified child who seeks pretexts so that its mother shall not leave it. And he thought, as they went so together, that their lives were strangely overturned since this could be; for until now Tony had been his child. It had been he who had sustained and comforted Tony.

"Why do you go?" he repeated. "You can rest with me here: not saying anything; only being quiet, together."

"No, Bevis dear; no." She shook her head slowly, and her face was turned away from him. "We must not be together now."

He knew that it was what she must say. He knew the terror in her heart. He saw Malcolm, mourning, unappeased, between them. Yet, summoning his will, summoning the claim of life against that detested apparition, expressing, also, the sickness of his heart as he saw his devastated future, "You must n't make me a lonely curlew, too," he said.

He was sorry for the words as soon as he had uttered them. It was a different terror they struck from her sunken face. She stood for a moment and looked at him and he remembered how she had looked the other day — oh! how long ago it seemed — when he had frightened her by saying he might get over her. But it was not his child who looked at him now. "I have broken your heart! I have broken your heart, too!" she said.

"Far from it!" he declared. And he tried to smile at her. "Wait till I get you safely to London. You'll see how it will revive!"

The door stood open between them, and it was not his child who looked at him, answering his sally with a smile as difficult as his own. "Dear, brave Bevis," she murmured.

And, as she turned and left him, he saw again the love that had cherished him so tenderly, faltering, helpless, at the threshold of her lips and eyes.

VIII

MISS LATIMER dined with him. She told him that the poor woman had died, and they talked of the Peace Conference. Miss Latimer read her papers carefully and the subject floated them until dessert. She spoke with dry scepticism of the League of Nations. Her outlook was narrow, acute, and practical. As they rose from the table she bade him good-night.

"Do you mind giving me a few moments, in the library, first?" he said. "I don't suppose we'll have another chance for a talk. You and Antonia are going to Cornwall, I hear."

She hesitated, looking across at him, still at the table, from the place where she had risen. "Yes. We are. I have a great deal to do."

"I know. But our train is not early. I should be very much obliged." Under the compulsion of his courtesy she moved before him, reluctantly, to the library.

"You see" — Bevis following, closed the door behind them — "a great deal has happened to me since we talked yesterday. I've heard of things I did not know before. They have changed my life and Antonia's. And since it's owing to you that they've come, I think you'll own it fair that I should ask for a little more enlightenment."

His heart had stayed sunken in what was almost despair since Tony had left him. He had no plan; no hope. It was in a dismal sincerity that he made his request. There might be enlightenment. If there were, only she could give it. She was his antagonist; yet, unwillingly, she might show him some loophole of escape.

Reluctance evidently battled in her with what might be pride. She did not wish to show reluctance. She took a straight chair near the table at a little distance from the fire and sat there with rather the air of an applicant for a post, willing, coldly and succinctly, to give information.

Bevis limped up and down the room.

"Why have you been working against me?" he

said at last. He stopped before her. "Or, no; I don't mean that. Of course you would work against me. You would have to. But why have n't you been straight with me? Did n't you owe it to me as much as to Tony to tell me what had happened?"

She looked back coldly at him. "I have not worked against you. I owe you nothing."

"Not even when what happened concerned me so closely?"

"It was for Antonia to tell you anything that concerned you." She paused and added, in a lower voice, "I should not choose to speak of some things to you."

"I see." He took a turn or two away. "Yes. After all, that's natural. But now you see me defeated and cast out. So perhaps you'll be merely merciful." He stopped again and scrutinized her.

Yes; he had seen in her face yesterday what her hatred could be. It was — all defeated and cast out as he was — hatred for him he saw now, evident, palpable, like a sword. And why should she hate him so much? Had she anything to fear? Like Œdipus before the Sphinx, he studied her.

"You believe that you saw Malcolm the other night?" She had not told him that she would be merciful, yet, apparently, she was willing to give information, since she sat there.

Something more evidently baleful came into her eyes as she answered, "It is not a question of belief."

"Of course; naturally. What I mean is — you did see him. Well, this is what I would like to know. Did you see him when you sat at the table with your head down, before we left the room?"

The question — he had not meditated it — it had come to him instinctively, like a whisper from some unseen friend — was as unexpected to her as it had been to him. She had expected, no doubt, to be questioned as to Malcolm's dress, attitude, and demeanour. She kept her eyes fixed; but a tremor knotted her brows, as if with bewilderment.

"As I sat at the table?" she repeated. "How do you mean?"

He did not take his eyes off her. He seemed to slide his hand along a sudden clue and to find it holding.

"I mean the vision of him standing beside the

fountain. Did it come to you first while we were at the window seeing nothing?"

She stared at him, and the bewilderment gained her eyes. "A vision? What do you mean by a vision? No. It was when you had gone. It was when I went to the window that I saw him standing there." Yet, even as she spoke, he saw that she was thinking with a new intensity.

Something had been gained. Safety required him, at the moment, not to examine it overmuch, not to arouse her craft. "I see," he said, as if assenting, and again he turned from her and again he came back, with a new question. "You think he came because he is suffering?"

She had looked away from him while she thought, and as her eyes turned to him he saw the new edge to their hatred. "Yes. Suffering," she said. And her eyes added: "Because of you."

"You told Tony he was suffering?"

"I answered her questions."

"He will be appeased by her sacrifice of me?"

She paused a moment, as if with a cold irony for

his grossness. "It is her heart he misses," she then said.

He stood across the table from her, considering her. For the first time he seemed to see in full clearness the force of the passion that moved her. Her very being was centred in one loyalty, one devotion. She would, he felt sure, sacrifice any thing, any one, to it. He considered her and she kept her cold, ironic face uplifted to his scrutiny. There was desecration, he felt, in the blow his mind now prepared. Yet, as she was merciless, so he, too, must be. "How is it he comes to you and not to Tony?" he asked her. "How is it you know what he suffers?"

Unsuspecting, she was still ready to deal with him, since that was to be done with him. "I have always been like that. I have always known things and felt them, and sometimes seen them. I have known Malcolm since he was a child. There is nothing he has felt that I have not known. It frightened him, sometimes, to find that I had known everything. — The bond is not broken."

"No. It is not. But do you see what I am going to

tell Antonia to-morrow?" he said, not stirring as, with his folded arms, he looked across at her. "That such a bond as that sets her free. It's you he comes for; you he misses. Realities take their place after death. Things come out. He did n't know it while he was alive. You were too near for him to know it. But it's you who are his mate. You are the creature nearest to him in the universe."

She sat still for a moment after he had finished. Then she rose. Her little face, with its lighted glare, was almost terrifying. He saw, as he looked at her, that he had committed a sacrilege, yet he could not regret it.

"You know you lie," she said. — It had been a sacrilege, yet it might help him and Tony, for now all her barriers were down. — "If that were true how could I wish to keep her for him? He is the creature nearest to me in the universe, but I am not near him. Never, never, never," said Miss Latimer; and her voice, as she spoke, piped to a rising wail. "He was fond of me; never more than fond, and Antonia was the only woman he ever loved. I was with him in it

all. I helped him sometimes to answer her letters, for she frightened him with her cleverness, and he was not like that; he was not clever in your way. And he would grow confused. Nothing ever brought us so near. It was of her we talked that last night, beside the fountain, in the flagged garden. It was then he told me that he knew, whatever happened to him, that he and Antonia belonged to each other forever."

It was the truth, absolute and irrefutable. Yet, though before it, and her, in her bared agony, he knew himself ashamed, the light had come to him as it blazed from her. It gave him all he needed. He was sure now, as he had not been sure before, of what was not the truth. Malcolm, as a wraith, a menace, was exorcised. There was only Miss Latimer to deal with.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I was wrong. You convince me. But there's something else." She had dropped down again upon her chair and she had put up her hand to her face, and so she sat while he spoke to her. "You see, your love explains everything," he said. "I mean, everything that needs explaining.

Don't think I speak as an enemy. It's only that I understand you and what has happened to you, and to us, better than you do yourself. You are so sure of your fact that you feel yourself justified in giving it to Antonia in a symbol; so, as you say, to keep her for him. You are sure he is here; you are sure he suffers; and you feel it right to tell her you have seen him, to save her from herself, as you would see it; and from me."

Her hand had dropped and the face she showed him was, in its bewilderment, in its desperation, its distraction, strangely young; like the face of a child judged by some standard it does not understand. "A symbol? What do you mean by a symbol?" she asked, and her voice was the reedy, piping voice of a child.

He pressed home his advantage. "You have not seen Malcolm. You believe that he is here and you believe he suffers. But you have not seen him. On your honour; — can you look at me and say, on your honour, that you have seen him?"

She looked at him. She stared. And it was with the

eyes of the desperate child. "How could I not have seen him? How could I have known?"

"The table rapped it out for you, because you are a medium. It's a mystery that such things should be; but you say yourself that, in life, your mind read Malcolm's. In the same way, the other night, it read Tony's. You saw what she saw. Everything is open to you."

She had risen and, with a strange gesture, she put her hand up to her head. "No — no. It was more than that. It was more than that. Antonia did not know. I did not know. No one knew, till I saw it; how he died. I saw him. Half his head was shot away."

He leaped to his triumph. "It was my mind that showed you that. I did know. I did know how he died. You read my mind as well as Tony's. Our minds built up the picture for you."

Her hand held to her head she stared at him. "It is not true! Not true! You say so now when I have told you."

"Ask Tony if it's not true. I told her what you'd seen before she told me. Miss Latimer — I appeal to

you. Our lives hang on you. Tell me the truth — tell it to me now, and to Tony to-night. You did not see him. Not what we mean by seeing. Not as Tony believes you saw. You had your inner vision while you leaned there on the table, and it convinced you of the outer. I've shown you how you built it up. Every detail of our knowledge was revealed to you. It's we who created Malcolm's ghost."

But she had turned away from him, and it was as if in desperate flight, blindly, pushing aside the chair against which she stumbled, still with her hand held as though to Malcolm's wound. "Not true! Not true!" she cried, and she flung aside the hand he held out to arrest her. "He is here! He has saved her! I saw him! Beside the fountain!"

IX

SHE was gone and he need not pursue her. Her desperation had given him all that he had hoped for, and there was no recantation, no avowal to be wrested from that panic. He had followed her to the door and he watched her mount the stairs, running as she went and without one backward glance. And when, at the end of the corridor above, he heard her door shut, he still stood in the open doorway, his head bent, his hands in his pockets, and took, it seemed in long draughts of recovery, full possession of his almost miraculous escape.

He saw the suffocating, vaultlike darkness where he had groped. Since Tony had gone from him that afternoon, the clotting horror had not left his heart. It had been a vault; tenebrous; a place of death. Yet flesh and blood had not come to his help. He had forced no doors and beaten down no walls. Such doors and walls did not yield to force. It had been his sensitiveness to reality that had led him forth. As,

sitting at the table the other night, he had seen the shadow, felt the scent of danger, so now his sensitiveness had shown him in the darkness something less dark. He had groped, he had crept, he had felt his way, from his intuition that Miss Latimer feared him to that memory of her form fallen forward on the little table, and the darkness that was only less dark had softly expanded to a pallor, until, suddenly, from her bewildered eyes and passionate negations, conviction of the truth had flashed upon him. It had been like turning the corner of a buttress to find the aperture that led out to pure, clear, starlit air. Of course, of course — how clearly now the light was spread! She had had her vision of Malcolm, not at the third window, but while she sat there at the table, her head bent down on her arms. She had lied only in saying that it had been objective. He and Tony had built it up for her.

His recovery was not only of freedom; he entered again, with his recognition of how he had found freedom, into possession of himself, into security and confidence. Flesh and blood had miserably failed him

that afternoon, and so he had failed Tony. What most had choked him in the darkness had been his self-contempt. For he had miserably, horribly, if pitifully and inevitably, failed her. Her fear had cankered his will and frozen his heart, and he had helped to fix her in it. Thank God, where flesh and blood had failed, intelligence and intuition had atoned. He was not worthless, after all. He had saved himself and he could save Tony.

As he stood there, and it had been for some little time, Thompson, Tony's maid, came down the staircase. She was a middle-aged woman, elegant of figure, with a gentle, careworn face, and he had always felt her friendly to his hopes. She carried a pair of Tony's shoes and gaiters, no doubt to have warmed to-morrow in readiness for the journey, and, not having noticed her for some days, he saw that her face was paler, more careworn than it had been. Tony was the sort of woman who would rouse devotion in her maid. He had already guessed that Thompson's was a romantic devotion; and now, their eyes meeting, something passed between them, so that, at the foot

of the stairs, Thompson paused, and he, glad to see her, glad to question her, asked, "How is Mrs. Wellwood to-night?"

"I'm afraid she's far from well, sir," said Thompson, and her kindly, decorous eyes dwelt on him. "She has n't been herself for some days. But she's gone off nicely now to sleep."

"Really? She's been sleeping so badly, I hear."

"Yes, sir, very badly. But I made her take a little hot milk, for she would eat no dinner, and that seemed to send her off quite soundly."

"You think she's fit to travel to-morrow?"

The dwelling of Thompson's eyes at this became almost urgent. "Oh, yes, sir. Oh, it will be the best thing for her, sir; to get away. It does n't suit her here at all. It's the place that does n't suit her. She's quite fit to travel; but I hope she won't go as far as Cornwall, sir. It would be much better if she stopped at her own house in London. Perhaps you could say something about it to her, sir. Perhaps" — and sustained by what she saw of understanding in his gaze she passed bravely beyond professional reticence —

"it's being so much with Miss Cicely that is n't good for her. It's not cheering, sir. They've both had such great sorrow. It would be much better if she stayed in London and Miss Cicely went on to Cornwall alone. Perhaps, if you see with me, sir, you might say something on the journey to-morrow. Anything you could say would have weight with Mrs. Wellwood."

Bevis, gazing hard at her, felt that he loved Thompson. She seemed to embody the warmth and sanity of the new life for which he was to save Tony. He had even the impulse, ridiculous yet so strong — for he was young and had not been happy for such a long time — to put his arms around her neck, his head on her shoulder, and tell her how much he loved Tony and what terrible danger they had been in. But, of course, she understood; understood how much he loved Tony and how great had been the danger. So all that he said, at last, was: "Yes; I do agree. Yes; I'll do my best. Thanks so awfully."

"I do so wish you joy, sir," Thompson murmured.

He was glad that she had said that. He needed to

have it said to him. Yet, after he had gone upstairs, pausing at Tony's door to make sure that, as Thompson had said, she was sleeping, after he had lighted his candles and stood there, meditating, in his room, alone in the silent house, it was not joy he felt. Joy was not yet achieved. Tony's enfranchisement, he foresaw, could not come from anything he might say to her. Her fear could never again infect him; but could his intuition free her? He would have only intuition to put before her, and Miss Latimer would be there with her lie that was half a truth. No; it could only be by the infection of his security and ardour that Tony could be won back from the darkness, and it should not fail her. But, until it had won her, he could feel no joy.

His room was at the other end of the corridor from Tony's, opposite Miss Latimer's, and he had not closed his door on entering. She could not yet be sleeping, and while she waked he would not sleep. Tony's slumber must be guarded. Anything was possible with Miss Latimer. She might go in to Tony with baleful warnings, warping beforehand his ac-

count of the interview. He must prevent her seeing Miss Latimer alone. During the journey that would be easy; and once London was reached he had Thompson to reënforce his strategy. They would go to Tony's house, and there he would talk to her. It would be in Tony's captivating drawing-room, with its cushions and fire-screens, its scent of lemon-verbena and sandalwood. Thompson would help him in it all. She would see that he had Tony to himself.

He undressed and lay down with a book and reading-candle, keeping his door ajar. Then, in the stillness, he became aware that Miss Latimer was weeping. Passionately yet monotonously she was sobbing; a strange agony of grief, with none of the plaints and moans of self-pity. Was it remorse, he wondered; despair for her exposure, or baffled fury at finding her prey escape her, and Tony to be restored to life again? But Miss Latimer would never feel remorse; would never feel herself exposed. And Tony was not her prey; it had been for another that she had tracked her down. All, all had been done, as all with her had

always been, for love of Malcolm. And, with a curious, unwilling pity, he knew, as he listened, that he did not believe of her that she felt herself to be a liar. Her simplicity had been unable to interpret truly the overwhelming experience that had befallen her. It had been as genuine, as immediate as that of a Jeanne d'Arc. She was an unsanctified saint; or, rather, a sibyl, who had found her magic inefficacious and who feared the menace to her beloved of a universe deaf to her incantations.

For hours she must have wept.

When, at last, for a long time, silence had fallen, and he had put out his light, he could not have slept had he wished it. It was his last night in the hateful house and the hours seemed heavy with significance. The wailing sobs, though silenced, still beat an undertone to his thoughts, thoughts of Malcolm, his dead friend, now, harmlessly, the immortal spirit; and thoughts of his dear Tony. Not till yesterday, when the waters had closed over them, had he known the depths of his love for Tony, and only through their anguish had the depths of her innocent, tragically

gentle heart been revealed to him. Yet, while he thought of her, yearning over her, in her childlike sleep, with love unspeakable, the anguish seemed to hover like a cloud above him, and Miss Latimer's sobs still to beat: — Dead. — Dead. — Dead.

X

THE first housemaids were already stirring when at last he fell into a heavy sleep. So heavy it was that it seemed long, yet only a few hours could have gone by before he was awakened by a rapping at his half-open door. Even as he drowsily struggled forth from slumber, he was aware that it was not the knock that announced hot water and the hour of rising.

He opened his eyes and saw Thompson standing in the doorway.

Her attitude as she stood there, dark and narrow, with her flawlessly neat outline, had still so much of professional decorum that, for a moment, it veiled from him the strangeness of her face.

"Oh, sir, could you come?" she said. And then he saw that her face was strange.

He sprang up while she stood outside. There was, he knew that, no time for his leg, though he seemed to know nothing else, and he threw on his dressing-gown and took up his crutches while Thompson

waited for him. But when he went out to her she still stood there, looking at him.

"Is Mrs. Wellwood ill?" he asked.

"Oh, sir, she's dead," said Thompson.

Then, standing in the corridor, he felt himself trying to think. It was like the moment in France when his leg had been shattered and he had not known whether he were alive or dead. But this was worse. This was not like the moment in France. There was only, then, himself. He could not think. Thompson had put her arm under his. He was hanging forward heavily on his crutches.

"Perhaps you'd better go back to bed, till a little later, sir. Till the doctor comes," she said. "It was an overdose of the powder. She's sometimes taken them since Mr. Wellwood was killed. And she must have made a mistake. It must have been a mistake, must n't it, sir? She had everything to live for." Thompson broke into sobs. "I've just found her. Miss Cicely is there. She sent a boy for the doctor. But it's too late. You'd only think her sleeping, so beautiful she is, sir."

"Help me," said Bevis. "I must come."

The curtains had been drawn in Tony's room and the morning sunlight fell across the bed where she lay. It was not as if sleeping; he saw that at the first sight of her. She lay on her back and her head was sunken down on her breast as though with a doggedness of oblivion. Still, she was beautiful; and he noted, his heart shattered by impotent tenderness, the dusky mark upon her eyelids, like the freaking on a lovely fruit.

Miss Latimer sat on the other side of the bed with her back to the light. Beside her stood the little tray of early morning tea that Thompson had brought in and set down on the table near her mistress before drawing the curtains.

Thompson helping him, he reached the bed and laid hold of the bedpost.

"Yes. I can manage. Thank you so much," he said to her.

So he was left, confronting Miss Latimer; and Tony was between them.

He did not look at Miss Latimer. His being was

absorbed in contemplation of the dead woman. With sickening sorrow he reconstructed the moments that had led her to this act. It had not been unintentional. He remembered her still look, her ineffable gentleness of the day before. She had intended then; or, if not then, the grief that had come upon them both had fixed her in her design.

She had escaped. She had taken refuge from herself, knowing her longing heart must betray her did she linger. She had perhaps, in some overwhelming scepticism, taken refuge, in what she craved to be unending sleep, from the haunting figure of her husband. Or perhaps it had been in atonement to Malcolm and she had believed herself going to him. But no; but no; the dull hammer-stroke of conviction fell again and again upon his heart; it had been in despair that she had gone. In going she had turned her back upon her joy.

He had looked a long time when a consciousness of something unfitting pressed in upon his drugged absorption. Looking up from Tony's dear, strange face, he saw that Miss Latimer's eyes were on him

and that she was not weeping. Shrivelled, shrunken as she appeared, sitting there, her hair dishevelled, a bright Chinese robe wrapped round her, there was in her gaze none of the fear or the bewilderment of the night before. It saw him, and its cruel radiance was for him; yet it passed beyond him. Free, exultant, it soared above him, above Tony, like a bird rising in crystal heights of air at daybreak. His mind fell back, blunted, from its attempt to penetrate her new significance. He only knew that she did not weep for Tony, that she rejoiced that Tony was dead, and an emotionless but calculating hatred rose in him.

"You see you've killed her," he said. "It was n't too late last night. If you'd gone in to her last night, after you left me, you could have saved her."

And if he, last night, had gone in to Tony, he could have saved her. He thought of his long vigil. During all those hours that he had guarded her, she had been sinking, sinking away from him. He remembered his vision of her piteous, helpless hands lying on the table. She had stretched herself upon the darkness and it had sucked her down.

Miss Latimer's radiant gaze was upon him; but she made him no reply.

"Curse you!" said the young man. "Curse you!"

She saw him, but it was like the bird, gazing down from its height at the outsoared menace of a half-vanished earth. And her voice came to him now as if from those crystal distances.

"No," she said, "Antonia has saved herself. You drove her to it. You made it her only way."

"You drove her to it, you cursed liar! I could have made her happy. It was me she loved. Yes, take that in, more than she loved Malcolm. Nothing stood between us but your lies. You determined and plotted it, when the weapon was put into your hands by our folly. You've killed her, and you are glad that she is dead."

She did not pause for his revilement. Her mind was fixed in its exultation. "No; it was Malcolm she loved more dearly. She chose between you. She knew herself too weak to stay. He came for her and she has gone to him. He has forgiven her. The husband and the wife are together."

Bevis leaned his head against the bedpost and closed his eyes. The idle folly of his fury dropped from him. He felt only a sick loathing and exhaustion. "Leave me," he muttered. "You'll not grudge me what I have left. Leave me with her. Never let me see your face again."

Almost as if with a glad docility, drawing, in the spring sunlight, her brilliant robe about her, Miss Latimer rose, and her face kept the glitter of its supernatural triumph. She obeyed as if recognizing to the full his claim upon the distenanted form lying there. For a moment only she paused beside the bed and looked down at the dead woman, and he seemed then, dimly, and now indifferently, to see on her lips the pitiless smile of a priest above a sacrificial victim.

Then the rustle of her robe passed round the room. The door closed softly behind her, and he was alone with all that was left him of Tony.

THE END

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 10046 969 9